

Two trains forced back to Dhaka

KISHOREGANJ, Mar 23: Two passenger trains bound for Mymensingh from Dhaka faced obstructions and could not reach their destination as opposition activists put barricades at two stations in the district today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said DBM 201 up local train came under attack at Kullarchar station at about 11 am. It was stranded at the station for eight hours and was forced back to Dhaka.

A mail train between Rajshahi and Dhaka and between Rajshahi and Goalanda via Pabna have been snarled due to the ongoing non-cooperation movement.

Road communications in the 16 northern districts also have been disrupted as motor vehicles remained garaged, causing much suffering to the commuters and consumers as well.

People from Pabna are going to the divisional headquarters of Rajshahi via Natore by rickshaw vans.

Commuters also are moving from Dhaka to Rajshahi and Rajshahi to Goalanda by van, the only alternative means of communications, as the intercity Pabna and Jamuna express trains are still inoperative.

Meanwhile, 16 pilgrims in four vans left Pabna Friday for Dhaka on way to Makkah for performing hajj.

Meanwhile, train communication between Dhaka and Chittagong became almost normal today after a virtual standstill for two weeks due to the Opposition's non-cooperation programme.

Army personnel, deployed to ensure safe passage by road and rail between Dhaka and Chittagong, guarded different stations and points on the rail route on the 15th day of the anti-government programme.

There were good number of passengers in the trains, sources in Kamalapur station said.

Railway sources said 13 trains left Kamalapur station in the capital till 6 pm today while six others were scheduled to leave in the night.

Two goods trains — one carrying 44 containers and the other with 66 wagons — also left the port city today.

Witnesses said opposition pickets numbering about 50-60 stoned the Mahanagar Urmeel at Khanabari near Bhairab, damaging one compartment and injuring its 20 passengers.

Two of the injured — Parul, 30, of Jatrabari Jelepara and Rashida Akhter, 40, of Mollariet in Dhaka — were said to be in critical condition.

Later, the same group of pickets also stoned another goods train at about 1 pm at the same place.

In western zone, only Khulna-Paradah section operated today.

In fresh incidents, opposition activists uprooted two feet of railway tracks between Piarpur and Bidyanagar stations, near Jamalpur. Similar incident also took place between Ishwarganj and Sohagi stations near Kishoreganj.

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A partial view of the human chain in the city organised by the ADAB and some grassroots people's organisations in the country yesterday demanding cancellation of the February 15 polls and fresh elections under a neutral caretaker government. — Star photo

Bid to win general elections Indian political parties looking for allies

NEW DELHI, Mar 23: With a hung parliament in the offing, Indian political parties have begun looking for allies in their bids to win the first general elections in five years, reports AFP.

Leaders of national and regional parties are exploring alliances which would involve joint campaigning or other arrangements in a bid to win the maximum number of seats in the 545-seat Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament.

"Since no party can sweep the polls this time, there will be very tough contests in almost every single constituency," said Ramvilas Paswan, a leader of the centrist Janata Dal (people's party).

"Each party will look for the best winning combination to try to form a government," he said in an interview, adding that his own party was hoping to rope in 'friendly parties' to prevent splitting votes.

Both the ruling Congress (I) Party and the main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) have given up their earlier hawkishness over going it alone in the staggered April-May hustings.

"Right now our state units are taking a friendly to decide with whom we should join hands," said BJP spokeswoman

Human chain demanding cancellation of Feb 15 polls

By Staff Correspondent. The Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) and Trinamool Janasangathan, a platform of grassroots organisations, yesterday staged a countrywide human chain programme demanding cancellation of the February 15 polls and holding of fresh elections within 90 days.

Men and women belonging to different private voluntary development organisations as well as various professional groups started forming the human chain in Dhaka at about 11 am, with noticeable breaks at many places.

In the capital, part of the chain was formed at Amin Bazar, Mirpur, Asad Gate, Science Laboratory, New Market, Azimpur and at the central Shaheed Minar.

Thousands of people participated in the human chain programme in greater Bogra, Manikganj, Faridpur, Rajshahi and elsewhere in the country, ADAB leaders said.

They alleged that the law enforcing agencies at many places in Dhaka obstructed the development workers in forming the human chain.

At some places, several crackers were hurled on the participants, the leaders claimed.

Speaking at a brief gathering in front of the Central Shaheed Minar, ADAB Chairperson Dr. Qazi Faruq Ahmed said that the development workers have been forced to take to the streets because of the present political crisis, that shows no sign of letting up.

He said that the poor, both rural and urban, were the worst victims of the political crisis and cautioned that if the impasse continues the country might experience famine and a civil strife.

Dr. Ahmed, who also heads the Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendro, suggested that an early election under a caretaker government with wide participation of political parties and voters was the only way out.

Most of the speakers, however, suggested that the bill, along with the suggestions, should be sent to a parliamentary select committee for scrutiny.

Others who spoke on the occasion included Law Minister Jamiruddin Sircar, Morshed Khan, Ebadur Rahman and Khandaker Mahbubuddin.

Husband, wife electrocuted in Barisal

BARISAL, Mar 23: An official of the agriculture extension department and his wife were electrocuted at their residence in Gournadi thana of the district this morning, police said, reports BSS.

The victims are: ABM Delwar Hossain, 38, a block supervisor of Agriculture Extension Department, and his wife Jharna Akhter, 25.

According to the sources, their TV antenna fell on the 11,000 volt main electric line running over the roof of their residence on Friday night.

Delwar Hossain was electrocuted as he tried to disconnect the antenna cable from the television set. His wife tried to save her husband, but as soon as she touched him, she was also electrocuted.

30 hurt as JCD factions clash in Pabna

PABNA, Mar 23: At least 30 people were injured in a gunfight between two factions of ruling BNP's student wing, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), in the town's Anantapara tonight, reports UNB.

Six of the injured — namely, Peraz, Jewel, Billal, Hira, Amjad and Rajab — were admitted to Pabna Sadar Hospital with bullet wounds.

Police and witnesses said two factions of the JCD went on fighting at about 9 pm when a supporter of Kalu group was chased by rival Swapan group of the area.

31 killed in Indonesian bus accident

JAKARTA, Mar 23: Thirty-one people were killed when a speeding bus slammed into a car today at the outskirts of Jakarta and burst into flames, police and eyewitness said, reports AP.

The bus carrying 45 people was heading from Jakarta to the West Java capital of Bandung when it swerved to avoid a parked car, ramming into a jeep, said Manan, an eyewitness.

Bid to win general elections

Indian political parties looking for allies

Indian polls may be shifted for Eid-ul-Azha

NEW DELHI, Mar 23: The election commission is actively considering shifting the first phase of Lok Sabha polls, scheduled to be held on April 27, as it clashed with the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Azha, reports BSS.

The Muslim leaders and several political parties have made representations to Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Chief Election Commissioner T. N. Seshan to consider the matter, media reports said today.

Attack on JMB engineer

SIRAJGANJ, Mar 23: Some local people attacked a vehicle of the contractor of the west approach road of the Jamuna Bridge, injuring an engineer at Madhya Bhadrachhat here today, reports UNB.

Police said a vehicle of local people halted the vehicle of MS Song, Chief Engineer (Survey) of Samwan Corporation, the Korean contractor of Nalka-Saydabad approach road, demanding one more culvert in their area.

While Song was arguing that only two culverts have been sanctioned for the area, the local people pelted bricks and stones at his vehicle injuring him in the right eye.

Police rushed the spot and sent the Korean national to Sirajganj General Hospital for treatment.

A case has been filed with Sirajganj police.

Cancel 15 polls, form caretaker govt: Jamaat

Jamaat-e-Islami leader Maulana Matur Rahman Nizami yesterday urged the government to cancel the 4-point demand of the opposition to bring about a prompt solution of the current crisis and save the country from further chaos and destruction, reports UNB.

At a rally at the northern gate of Baitul Mukarram mosque in the afternoon, Nizami reiterated the demands calling for immediate cancellation of the February 15 election, resignation of the government, formation of a caretaker government and fresh polls in May.

He advised the ruling party to accept the reality that the people are united to realise the demand of holding election under a non-party caretaker government.

The Jamaat secretary general suggested establishing a caretaker government on the basis of the advice of the Supreme Court.

About the deployment of army the Jamaat leader asked the ruling party to take lessons from the past.

Nizami warned, "If Begum Khaleda Zia does not act promptly to accept the demands of the opposition, she will have to face the fate of Ershad and Awab Khan."

He said the government had totally failed to restore normalcy in the country even after four days of the deployment of the army.

40 Taliban rebels killed in Afghanistan

KABUL, Mar 23: Government jets bombed rebel strongholds south of the Afghan capital, killing 40 guerrillas, a government spokesman said today, reports AP.

The air raids late Friday were launched to drive Taliban rebels from their positions in Charasyab and the Rishkor Hills along the southern outskirts of Kabul.

The purpose of the bombing was to desolate an unusually large gathering of the Taliban, said Defence Ministry spokesman Amrullah, who like many Afghans has only one name.

The death toll in Friday's government air raids could not be independently confirmed. Both sides in the past have been guilty of exaggerating the amount of damage inflicted on one another during battle.

For several days, Taliban rebels and forces loyal to President Burhanuddin Rabbani exchanged heavy rocket and mortar fire near the Rishkor Hills overlooking Kabul's southern suburbs.

The Taliban, many of whom are former religious students, hope to impose strict Islamic rule throughout Afghanistan.

The Midnight File

India won't slow down space programme: Rao

NEW DELHI, Mar 23: Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao today said India will not slow down its ambitious space programme, which aims to carve a niche in the multi-billion-dollar commercial satellite launch sector. "The space programme will never be allowed to languish as it is our show-piece," Rao told Indian space scientists visiting the premier after Thursday's flawless launch of the country's most powerful satellite rocket, reports AFP.

LTTE ambushes army patrol, kills 40 troops

COLOMBO, Mar 23: Heavy fighting raged in eastern Sri Lanka today as Tamil Tiger guerrillas wiped out an entire army patrol, killing 40 troops and a civilian bus passenger, official sources here said, reports AFP.

Gunmen of the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) ambushed the security forces at Sittandy in the district of Batticaloa triggering fierce hand-to-hand fighting, the sources said.

A civilian bus drove straight into the fire and a Muslim passenger was killed on the spot," a police source here said adding that the bus was taking pilgrims home after a religious ceremony.

Initial reports said 28 soldiers were killed and another 12 wounded but officials said it was now confirmed that all 40 troops in the platoon were dead.

The army poured reinforcements to the area and deployed two Mi-24 helicopter gunships to attack the Tamil Tiger guerrillas involved in the attack but rebel casualties were not immediately known, the sources here said.

The attack marked a further escalation of violence in the embattled eastern region where 12 days ago the LTTE attacked an elite police commando unit and killed 23 troopers.

Five days ago, 18 soldiers died in a mine attack in the north of the country. Another 11 soldiers died in two attacks over a last weekend.

The LTTE is leading a protracted campaign for an independent homeland on the island's northern and eastern regions where the two million Tamil minority is concentrated. More than 50,000 people have died in the fighting since 1972.

Bomb attack on tank lorry in Khulna

From Our Correspondent. KHULNA, Mar 23: A tank lorry carrying furnace oil for jute mills came under a bomb attack here at about 3 pm today.

The driver, who was seriously injured, fled after being chased by some unidentified people.

Later, another driver was engaged who took the tank lorry to its destination at the Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills under police escort.

After having failed to set the tank lorry on fire, a group of rowdy people created a reign of terror at Khalishpur BIDD road by exploding hundreds of hand bombs and firing shots.

They set fire to some roadside shanties. At one stage, they hurled bombs and bricks at BDR jawans who were called in to tackle the situation.

Indefinite sit-in

From Page 1 make the Secretariat 'inoperative' from today by not attending offices.

"If BNP activists attack you with arms, I am ordering you to snatch those weapons and counter the attacks."

Earlier, addressing the mammoth gathering, Hasina said the non-cooperation programme will continue till fall of the 'illegal government' the legitimate demands of people. "I am ready to shed my blood for the cause of peoples' rights."

She also called for peoples' participation in the sit-in.

The AL chief reiterated her demands for cancelling the February 15 polls, resignation of the government and holding of elections under a caretaker government. "Stop the drama inside the Jatiya Sangsad. Quit now and cancel the sixth parliament," she said.

"We raised the caretaker government issue in the JS and tried for 10 months to table a bill but were not allowed. Now, under peoples' pressure she (Begum Zia) has been forced to accept it. But, we don't want it to be passed by vote thieves," said Hasina.

She also urged the members of law enforcing agencies and armed forces not to harass people "just for the sake of safeguarding the power of vote thieves."

As the rally was in progress, people at Bangabandhu Avenue area were seen running in panic at around 3:30 pm. Some processionists marching towards the rally alleged that a procession from Lalbagh area came under armed attack near Fazlul Haq Hall of Dhaka University.

The rally was also addressed by AL general secretary Zillur Rahman, Prof Mamatazuddin Ahmed, Prof Kabir Chowdhury, Advocate Shamsul Haq Chowdhury, Sayed Hasan Imam, Abdul Ahad Chowdhury, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Ramendu Mazumder, Panna Kaiser besides representatives of various professional groups.

Major changes

From Page 1 The proposals were made at an emergency meeting of the BNP parliamentary party held with the Prime Minister and party chief Begum Khaleda Zia in the chair yesterday evening, meeting sources said.

According to the sources, Afzal H Khan proposed that no retired judge should head the caretaker government. He argued that the party should prefer institutions to individuals for heading the advisory council. Former minister Nazmul Huda is learnt to have supported his view.

Khan also said that the chiefs of the services, BDR and police should be included in the interim government to make the administration an effective one the meeting sources said. When contacted, Khan however, refused to make any comment.

Former minister M K Anwar opposed the idea of including the chiefs of the services, the sources said.

Barrister Ziaur Rahman floated the idea of including the immediate past chiefs of the professional and trade bodies.

Members addressing the meeting opposed the idea of allowing an eminent individual on the ground that it would lead to controversies.

31 killed in Indonesian bus accident

JAKARTA, Mar 23: Thirty-one people were killed when a speeding bus slammed into a car today at the outskirts of Jakarta and burst into flames, police and eyewitness said, reports AP.

The bus carrying 45 people was heading from Jakarta to the West Java capital of Bandung when it swerved to avoid a parked car, ramming into a jeep, said Manan, an eyewitness.

Bandung is about 180 kilometers south of Jakarta.

Shibir activists

From Page 1 in the residents of Shamsuzaman Shams, District Convener of Chhatra League (Pro-JSD-Imj) at Ambarkhana.

The JCD group also allegedly blasted a number of crackers in the official residence of Superintendent, Sylhet District Jail this afternoon. The guard was also beaten up, the jail super said. The JCD group was pressing division for some of their fellows in the jail.

Violence in city

From Page 1 were received from some other areas in the city including Kadamtala, Basabo, Mirpur, Mahakhali and Jatrabari. None was however, injured, witnesses said.

BRTC's double-decker buses and a number of privately owned mini-buses were seen plying on various city roads under escort by security personnel.

Long distance buses did not ply.

A number of autorickshaws plied on the roads from the morning. The opposition had earlier, announced that those would be allowed to ply from 3 pm to 5 am everyday.

In some shopping centres, some shops opened in the morning.

Security personnel were seen patrolling different areas of the city.

Nor'wester

From Page 1 ing at his IRRRI paddy farm at 4 pm.

District Agriculture Extension Department sources said standing crops were severely affected by the nor'wester coming from Kanaipur, Kaizuri, North Channel and Degreer Char unions in Sadar thana and Goshi union in Nagarkanda thana.

Faridpur is the major onion-seed growing areas in the country, and the damage may create adverse impact on the onion-seed market, they said.

Temporary Hajj camp at Uttara

A temporary Hajj Camp has been set up at Uttara Sector-8 for accommodating the Hajj pilgrims who will perform Hajj this year under government arrangement, reports UNB.

The pilgrims started to arrive in the capital yesterday. The first Hajj flight is scheduled to leave Dhaka on March 27.

Hajj officials are working there round the clock, said an official handout yesterday.

2 killed in Ctg

From Page 1 the 15th day of the Opposition called non-cooperation programme.

Autorickshaws said tempos plied after 3 pm during exemption period. Besides some autorickshaws and tempos were seen plying from morning. A few PKTY bus and trucks also plied here.

Army patrol at important places of city continued today also.

Huge contingents of police and BDR were seen on guard around the Secretariat. Barbed wire fences, riot vans and police carrying water cannon were also seen there.

Organisers said there were arrangements of dry food, donated by sympathisers, for people participating in the sit-in.

Civic amenities

From Page 1 Star team at 9 pm, few thousand people were seen sitting on mats stretched over the road in front of the Jatiya Press Club. Hanif was flanked by some other AL leaders including Abdur Razzak and Begum Matiya Chowdhury.

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