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PM meets President for his assent to Bill

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia yesterday called on President Abdur Rahman Biswas at Bangabhaban and requested him to take necessary steps as early as possible to give assent to the Constitution amendment bill relating to formation of a non-party caretaker government passed unanimously in the sixth Parliament, reports BSS.

During the meeting, the Prime Minister also requested the President to take initiative at the earliest after his assent to the bill to constitute the non-party caretaker government.

During the meeting with the President, the Prime Minister referred to her earlier discussion with the President for holding election in May and requested the President to take necessary steps to hold election by May next.

Our Staff Correspondent adds: Earlier, the Prime Minister held a series of meetings with her party colleagues to discuss the latest political situation and her steps to resolve the long-drawn political impasse at the earliest possible time, according to BNP sources.

Meeting sources said that party leaders stressed

the need for making the major opposition parties agree to participate in the process of forming the non-party caretaker government and contest the fresh general elections under such a government, prior to the present government's resignation.

Besides, designated leaders of the ruling party were having contacts with the top opposition leaders on the formation of the caretaker government after the President gives his consent to it.

Meanwhile, the caretaker government bill was learnt to have been sent to Bangabhaban for the President's assent last night.

Justice Rahman yet to study content of Bill

Justice Habibur Rahman, the immediate past Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, would study the content of the just passed Thirteenth Amendment Bill before giving his consent to head the non-party caretaker government.

Asked over telephone if he would respond to the President's request to take the responsibility of heading the non-party caretaker government, Justice Rahman told The Daily Star last night: "I have not yet seen the final text"

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President urged to form caretaker govt 35 secys express inability to attend office from today

Secretaries of different ministries yesterday called on President Abdur Rahman Biswas and suggested that the immediate formation of a caretaker government was the only way to restore normalcy in the country.

According to meeting sources, the secretaries informed the President that the government officials and employees would not be able to attend offices from today if the country's overall situation did not improve.

The delegation submitted a 6-point proposal to the President.

A delegation of 35 secretaries of different ministries and divisions led by Cabinet Secretary Muhammad Ayubur Rahman met the President at Bangabhaban to express their concern over the deteriorating law and order situation in the country.

They said that due to the lack of adequate security the government officials were now unable to perform their duties, the sources said. The country's administration and economy were on the verge of collapse, the secretaries observed.

Pointing out that a broad national consensus has been reached over the issue of the caretaker government for holding the next general election, the delegation said that the caretaker government should be formed immediately, the sources added.

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Ban on rallies, demos in and around Sectt

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) authorities last night barred rallies, demonstrations and processions in and around the Secretariat from six am to 3 pm today. The ban would be effective inside the Secretariat, at Abdul Ghani Road and the Link Road, in between the Secretariat and Press Club.

Meanwhile, the employees and officers of the Bangladesh

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JS avoids referendum Caretaker govt bill passed

The Jatiya Sangsad adopted the Constitution (thirteenth amendment) Bill, 1996 Tuesday morning, providing for holding of all future general elections under non-party caretaker government.

The question of referendum on the amendment was avoided by inserting a new Article in the Constitution. Law Minister Barrister Jamiruddin Sircar told the House.

The House passed the Bill at 6 am with 268 votes after a six-and-a-half-hour marathon sitting. None voted against.

The House welcomed the passage of the Bill with thunderous cheers while Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali was in the chair. The Bill, introduced in the House by Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jamiruddin Sircar was cleared by the House in an amended form in only two days of discussion.

After the Bill was passed by the 6th Jatiya Sangsad, Leader of the House and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in a short speech hoped that the passage of the Bill would end the persisting political crisis in the country.

According to the provisions of the Bill, a non-party caretaker government would be formed within 15 days of the dissolution of Parliament. The caretaker government will assist the Election Commission (EC) in holding a free, fair and impartial general election to be held within 90 days of the dissolution of the Jatiya Sangsad.

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People of all walks of life visited the Jatiya Smriti Soudha at Savar on March 26 to pay homage to the martyrs of the War of Independence. — Star photo

Structure of caretaker govt Opposition may sit if Chief Adviser invites

Leaders of the three major opposition parties yesterday indicated that they might participate in the proposed general elections in May provided the Prime Minister resigns immediately, Parliament is dissolved and a neutral non-party caretaker government is formed.

Highly-placed sources in the Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami confirmed separately that they would be willing to take part in the elections if their demands were met.

The Opposition has already conveyed the message "through third parties" that they were willing to sit with the BNP as a political organisation, and not as a ruling party, under the aegis of the Chief Adviser of the caretaker government, the sources said.

The Opposition leaders also indicated that their participation would follow only after the Chief Adviser invites them for discussions on the structure of the proposed caretaker government.

The sources, who spoke to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity, admitted that the BNP leadership had contacted them over the last two days, but no formal talks were held.

"If any move is initiated, it has to be done by the ruling party," a senior leader of the Awami League said, "the legal ball game now rests in the BNP court."

The PM has to resign, the parliament has to be dissolved and a caretaker government formed. The Opposition could join then, he said explaining.

"Once the basic demands of the Opposition were fulfilled, why should there be any hindrances in participating the elections," a Jatiya Party stalwart said preferring not to be

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Non-cooperation resumes: Hajj pilgrims out of purview

After a two-day break the Opposition called countrywide indefinite non-cooperation movement begins at six this morning.

Earlier, the mainstream opposition — Awami League, Jatiya Party, and Jamaat-e-Islami — relined their non-cooperation programme across the country from Monday midnight to 6 am today on the occasion of the Independence Day.

Vehicles carrying Hajj pilgrims would remain outside the purview of non-cooperation programme while vehicles transporting foodstuff would be allowed to operate from 5 pm to 5 am next day. Besides, shops will remain open from 3 pm to 10 pm while export-led industrial units including garment factories will operate from 4 in the afternoon till 5 pm next morning, according to an Awami League press release.

'Janatar Manch' for all fighting 'illegal' govt

Mayor of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), Mohammad Hanif yesterday opened the 'Janatar Manch' for all in the anti-government till the 'illegal' government of Begum Zia quits, reports UNB.

This Manch (stage) is not the Manch of a person or a party, it is the stage for all who are fighting the illegal government, demanding its resignation, cancellation of the February 15 elections and fresh voting under caretaker government," he said urging all to use the data outside the National Press Club.

Addressing a huge crowd, beaming amidst patriotic songs and dance punctuated with political speeches, Hanif said the Manch would remain here, movement would continue until the fall of this regime.

Earlier, city corporation commissioners of different wards addressed the gathering expressing solidarity with the ongoing movement.

The rally was, addressed among others, by Dhaka University Teachers' Association President ATM Zahurul Huq, DUTA General Secretary Dr AASM Arefin Siddique, Shudhanshu Shekhar Haldar, D Jamal Uddin Chowdhury of BMA, and commissioners Kamran Chowdhury, Khulnazaman Chowdhury, Abdus Salam, Mainul Huq and Nasibun Ahmed.

More podiums in city likely

Major opposition political parties are planning to set up separate podiums in the city to intensify their ongoing agitation programme, sources in the parties told The Daily Star last night.

The podiums are being planned against the backdrop of setting up of the 'Janatar Manch' by Dhaka city Mayor Mohammad Hanif near the Jatiya Press Club for his sit-in programme.

Awami League organising secretary Mohammad Nasim while talking to the Daily Star said that other parties in agitation may also raise their own podiums.

"We discussed the issue in Sunday's meeting of the Jalsan committee," Nasim said.

Jatiya Party General Secretary Anwar Hossain Manju said, the parties in agitation are united in the agitation programme on specific issues. "There was no bar in establishing separate podiums by other parties in agitation," he added.

Ali Hossain Mohammad Mujahid of Jamaat-e-Islami said that they were yet to discuss the issue with other partners in the agitation programme.

NEWS BRIEFS

JS adjourned till Mar 31

Speaker Shakh Razzak Ali adjourned parliament after a marathon sitting for over seven hours, stretching from Monday evening to early Tuesday morning, at 6:10 am till 7 pm on March 31. The House, during the overnight lengthy sitting, adopted the 13th amendment to the Constitution, creating provision for non-party caretaker government for holding all future general elections "more free and impartial," reports BSS.

SC Bar polls Mar 30, 31

The annual election of the Bangladesh Supreme Court Bar Association will be held on March 30 and 31 instead of March 27 and 28, a bar association press release said yesterday. The decision was taken at an emergency general meeting of the association yesterday. Association President Justice T H Khan presided over the meeting, reports BSS.

British envoy meets Ctg mayor

CHITTAGONG, Mar 27: British High Commissioner Peter J Fowler today called on Chittagong City Mayor ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury at the latter's office, a corporation press release said. The mayor apprised the British High Commissioner of the various development projects, undertaken by the corporation. Fowler assured the mayor that UK would continue to help for the development of Bangladesh, reports BSS.

10 hurt as AL, BNP clash in Ctg

From Staff Correspondent CHITTAGONG, Mar 27: At least 10 persons were injured in a gunfight between the activists of the Awami League and the BNP in Materpul area under Chandgaon thana today, witnesses and police said. One Md Hossain was admitted with bullet wounds to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital and the rest were taken to private clinics. The clash that erupted at 11 am continued for four hours.

Hartal observed in Sirajganj

From Our Correspondent SIRAJGANJ, Mar 27: A half-day hartal called by the Shahzadpur Thana Banik Samity was observed today protesting the killing of a businessman at Shahzadpur. Businessmen, Awami League and Jatiya Party brought out separate processions today at Shahzadpur demanding immediate arrest of the killers.

Marathon parleys

The behind-the-scenes debate over whether the constitutional amendment bill seeking general elections under a non-party caretaker government would be required to put to a referendum eventually made the MPs, Jatiya Sangsad Secretariat officials and the reporters concerned stay inside Parliament building the whole night.

The apparent inefficiency of the ruling party leaders to identify the technical flaws in text of the proposed bill also played a role to stagger the session into Tuesday morning.

The bill was introduced in the House Thursday. Law Minister Jamiruddin Sircar on Sunday proposed an eight-member Parliamentary Select Committee to extensively scrutinise the text of the bill.

The Law Minister made a commitment that the select body would submit its report to the Parliament Secretariat by 11:00 am the next day. The House approved the minister's proposal by voice vote, and the Speaker adjourned the sitting to resume at 7:00 pm Monday.

Twenty-five minutes after the resumption of the Parliament session on Monday evening, the Law Minister requested the Speaker to adjourn the House for an hour to facilitate "finalisation of the Select Committee report."

With the request, the minister concerned was exposed to Speaker Sheikh Razzak Ali's criticism as the report was supposed to be finalised by 11:00 am. The Speaker adjourned the House when Deputy Leader of Parliament Professor Badruddoza Chowdhury came to the rescue of the Law Minister.

But the House resumed at mid-night. Meanwhile, a major portion of the Select Committee report was revised at the Prime Minister's Parliament chamber.

Seven out of the eight members of the Select Committee opined that the bill, after passage by Parliament would be required to be put to referendum. They argued that the bill was going to change a major provision of the Constitution (Article 48/3) which states that the President can appoint a person as Prime Minister who is "a member of Parliament."

As the bill was proposing

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Fresh pledge to protect sovereignty, democracy

The nation celebrated the silver jubilee of Independence and National Day Tuesday with a renewed pledge to protect and uphold the nation's independence and sovereignty and consolidate democracy.

The independence was proclaimed on this day in 1971. The valiant people of the country waged a war against the Pakistani occupation forces to liberate the motherland.

Freedom fighters, members of the armed forces, BDR, police and the people unitedly fought the war that lasted nine months and cost over 30 lakh lives.

The day was heralded with a 31-gun salute.

The President, Prime Minister and Awami League Chief Sheikh Hasina issued separate messages on the eve of the occasion.

President Abdur Rahman Biswas took salute and inspected a ceremonial parade of the combined forces of army, navy, air force, BDR, police, BNCC and ansar-VDP at the National Parade Square in the morning.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, ministers, MPs, diplomats and high civil and military officials were present there.

On arrival at the National Parade Square, the President was welcomed by the Prime Minister, the Home Minister and the chiefs of the three services.

During the parade, the air force paratroopers impressed audience by landing from an altitude of eight thousand feet. War equipment displayed there also attracted the audience.

The President earlier placed wreaths at the "Shikha Anirban" (The eternal flame) in Dhaka Cantonment and paid tribute to the martyrs of the Liberation War. In the evening he hosted a reception at Bangabhaban.

The day was a public holiday.

Thousands of people visited the National Mausoleum at Savar and the Central Shaheed Minar in the morning and placed wreaths.

The government and different political and socio-cultural

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Acute loadshedding from next month 300mw power shortage likely

The country may experience a 300 MW power shortage before the summer sets in, according to sources concerned.

A 200 MW load shedding in the country now will increase during April-May period," said an official of the Bangladesh Power Development Board (BPDB).

An executive engineer of the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (DESA) said the city needs 550 MW of power but less than 500 MW is supplied. The requirement was 520MW last year.

Another DESA official told The Daily Star, that there was no immediate way out of the crisis because power generation could not be increased overnight.

"The government signed agreements for power projects but no project could be implemented in the last three years," said the DESA official. Most of the country's gas-fired power plants are aged-old and are running below capacity-level.

Due to insufficient supply of natural gas, the 60 MW Shikhabaha power plant could not be made operative. The Ghorashal Power plant the country's longest one, was producing at least 150 MW less than the installed capacity, the DESA official said.

Meanwhile, talking to this correspondent, some of the city dwellers at Mirpur, Magbazar, Kamalapur and in the old part of the city said they were experiencing regular power failure.

The power crisis will increase after the on-going non-cooperation programme of the Opposition is over because most of the garments and other small industrial units will run in full swing, the DESA and BPDB officials said.

Irrigation of IRI-boro croplands will also be affected if the situation does not improve because March-April period is the peak season of irrigation.

The country has an installed power generation capacity of around 2000 MW while the demand exceeded it by 200 MW, according to a source at the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources. But, experts says, BPDB's demand does not reflect the actual scenario. The actual demand might not be less than 3000 MW, they added.

Injured police sergeant, 3 others succumb to injuries

By DMCH Correspondent A police sergeant, who was seriously injured by a mob at Segun Bagicha in the city on March 24, died of the Combined Military Hospital (CMH) yesterday.

Anwarul Karim, 25, a traffic sergeant, who hailed from Bakerganj under Robinpur union of Barisal district, was caught by the mob at around 7 am. He received serious head injuries while being assaulted by the angry people. He was immediately admitted to the CMH.

Sergeant Karim, who did his M Com from Dhaka University, joined the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) in July last year, police sources said.

His Namaj-e-Janaza was

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Operation at Ctg Port resumes partially

CHITTAGONG, Mar 27: Partial operation at Chittagong port resumed from this afternoon after an 18-day shutdown due to the Opposition called indefinite non-cooperation movement, port sources said.

The resumption of port activities came after the non-cooperation programme was relaxed by Opposition leaders here for three days from today for cargo handling inside the port with overside delivery only in the cargo vessels now stuck up at the port jetties and outer anchorage.

The Opposition leaders belonging to the All Party Action Committee headed by mayor of Chittagong City Corporation and Awami League leader ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, unilaterally made the announcement of relaxation on resumption of port operations, on Monday, after the government side declined to sign a joint agreement on the issue with them.

But port operations as per relaxation announced by Opposition could not be resumed from this morning in the face of agitation by the pro-BNP dock workers and merchant labourers who demanded salaries for the 18 days of the non-cooperation, port sources said.

When contacted, acting chairman of the Chittagong Port Authority Captain Zahuruddin Mahmud said: "We

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