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NEWS BRIEFS

Sec 144 in Barlekha Thana HQ
From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Mar 28: Section 144 has been imposed on the thana headquarters of Barlekha in Moulvibazar district with effect from 8 PM today until further order. The action was taken by the District Magistrate following a series of clashes between the activists of the JCD and BCL in the thana headquarters and some other places during the last three days.

15 shops gutted in Barisal

From Staff Correspondent
BARISAL, Mar 28: At least 15 shops were gutted in a devastating fire that broke out at Alipur Bandar of Patuakhali district last night. Property worth over Tk 20 lakh was burnt to ashes, witnesses said. The fire which originated from a hotel engulfed the whole area within a short time.

Cow-lifter beaten to death

From Our Correspondent
BARISAL, Mar 28: An alleged cow-lifter was beaten to death by angry villagers at Maheshpur village under Bakerganj thana of Barisal district today. Both eyes of Sultan 40 were also gouged out by the villagers before handing him over to the police, witnesses said. A case was filed with Bakerganj thana.

23 vehicles damaged

MANIKGANJ, Mar 28: Opposition activists damaged as many as 23 vehicles on Dhaka-Aricha highway today during the non-cooperation programme. The vehicles came under attacks at Baipal, Savar, Nayrhat Islampur and Jahangirnagar University areas and other places on the road.

President assents to caretaker govt bill

By Staff Correspondent

President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday assented to the Constitution (Thirteenth Amendment) Bill, 1996 seeking provisions for general elections under non-party caretaker government.

The bill, passed by the sixth Parliament Tuesday morning, was sent to the President on Wednesday night.

Under the new provision, an 11-member caretaker administration headed by Chief Adviser would run the affairs of state during the period between dissolution of Parliament and taking over of office by an elected one.

The main responsibility of the non-party government will be to assist the Election Commission (EC) in holding free, fair and impartial national polls.

Prime Minister and BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia called on the President Wednesday evening and requested him to assent to the bill as soon as possible.

A section of BNP leadership, however, holds the view that the Constitution amendment bill should have been put to a referendum for people's approval. They still feel that the President could at least have sought the Supreme Court's opinion on the issue, sources concerned said.

Meanwhile, it was learnt the President sought the opinion of Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina on the issue of referendum on the bill, through a third party, on Wednesday night. Hasina said that a referendum on the bill was unnecessary and such attempt would further complicate the political situation, sources close to the third party told The Daily Star yesterday.



Abdur Rahman Biswas

JS likely to be dissolved after approval of 19 ordinances

By Nazmul Ashraf

Prime Minister and BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia is likely to request President Abdur Rahman Biswas to dissolve the sixth Jatiya Sangsad soon after the approval of 19 Ordinances, now pending with it, on Sunday to hasten the transfer of power to a non-party caretaker government, authoritative sources in the ruling BNP said last night.

Parliament session is scheduled to resume at 7 pm on Sunday.

The Ordinances were placed in the House the day after the present Parliament went into its first session on March 19.

Meanwhile, the President yesterday gave his assent to the non-party caretaker government bill and also started the process of forming the caretaker government.

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Biswas holds telephonic talks Justice Rahman may convey his decision to President today

By Staff Correspondent

The man most likely to head the non-party caretaker government, former Chief Justice Habibur Rahman, has had at least two telephonic conversations with President Abdur Rahman Biswas yesterday.

Contents of the discussions could not be known. But it was learnt that the President conveyed to Justice Rahman the contents of the bill which mandates him to be the first chief to assume the office of caretaker government, which is equal in status to the office of the Prime Minister.

Justice Rahman who received a copy of the bill yesterday is expected to convey his decision to President.

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Habibur Rahman

Ctg Port to operate for 2 more days

From Staff Correspondent
CHITTAGONG, Mar 28: Opposition leaders today decided to let the port operate for two more days.

Earlier, they had relaxed the non-cooperation partially for three days beginning from March 27.

Delivery of goods to and from Chittagong port was allowed from tonight but it was restricted by the Opposition leaders within the city only, port and Opposition sources said.

The decisions for further relaxation were taken at a joint meeting this afternoon at Chittagong City Corporation office between the port users, port officials and Opposition leaders headed by Mayor and Awami League leader ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury.

The Opposition leaders also agreed to allow delivery of cargo within the port city to comply with the requests from

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Employees coming out of the Secretariat after staging a sit-in at the VIP gate yesterday. — Star photo

Sit-in inside Sectt Many secys weren't seen at offices

By Staff Correspondent

Secretaries did not attend their offices as the Secretariat yesterday as the atmosphere was not congenial to work there any more, some of them, seeking anonymity, told The Daily Star last night.

On a visit to the Secretariat, this correspondent found that many of the offices of the secretaries were either locked or unattended.

Besides, in some of the Secretariat buildings, elevators were found inoperative and in some other buildings, collapsible gates were under lock and key.

Some junior officials, who were attending the sit-in of officials and employees yesterday, said "secretaries are not attending the offices today."

The high officials are not likely to attend offices till the demands put forward by them during their meeting with the President Wednesday were met, they said.

Of the 53 secretaries, 35 called on the President and suggested that immediate formation of a caretaker government was the only way to restore normalcy in the country.

Meanwhile, several thousand government officials and employees staged a sit-in inside Secretariat yesterday demanding immediate formation of a non-party caretaker government.

The demonstrators, who had earlier urged the President to announce formation of a caretaker government by March 27, took part in the sit-in at the VIP gate, defying the ban on holding of rallies and demonstrations in and around the Secretariat.

Normal activities at the Secretariat were badly disrupted due to the sit-in that started at 8:30 am and continued till 12 noon.

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Sit-in outside Secretariat continues

Opposition activists stayed overnight in front of the National Press Club to continue sit-in outside the Secretariat demanding immediate resignation "illegal" BNP government, reports UNB.

Thousands of people thronged the venue yesterday afternoon to join the sit-in demonstration around the Janata Manch (People's dais) for the cancellation of February 15 polls, resignation of the government and fresh elections under neutral caretaker government.

Government employees and officials, representatives from different professional groups, workers and commonmen joined the programme.

Meanwhile, the authorities had imposed ban on rallies and processions around the Secretariat from 6 am to 3 pm yesterday as preemptive measure against demonstration by government officials and employees. The restricted areas are Secretariat, from east end to west end of Abdul Gani road, and from south end to north end of the linkroad between

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Rural credit programmes coming to a halt

By RM Titumir and Inam Ahmed

The rural credit disbursement programmes of the private development organisations is coming to a halt because of the Opposition's on-going non-cooperation programme, according to sources in the organisations.

A large section of people being benefited by such programmes will again be trapped in absolute poverty, hindering achievement of the country's poverty alleviation target, they fear.

Since the economic activities have virtually come to a standstill, hundreds of thousands of self-employed small entrepreneurs—many of them women—have lost their livelihood as they are unable to market their products, the sources pointed out. They are now on way to becoming loan defaulters and losing their credit worthiness. Annually, these rural poor take over Tk 2000 crore as loans, often unaccounted for in the country's GDP.

Prof Mohammad Yunus, Managing Director of the Grameen Bank, said, "This man-made crisis, a big blow to

the life-line of the rural poor, has brought to a complete halt the economic activities, paralyzing the credit discipline."

About the Grameen Bank's credit activities, he said the Bank officials were failing to disburse the credits while the recipients were unable to repay their loan instalments.

"The borrowers of our institution, the poor are not now able to utilise their capital in economic activities because of the standstill," Prof Yunus said.

The situation has been become so compelling that the members of Grameen are being forced to encash their capital. In the future, this will render them defaulters making them unfit for receiving fresh credit from us," the Grameen Bank chief said. "Our borrowers' failure to repay their loans in turn would also mount pressure on our capital base as we also lend money by borrowing from other financial institutions."

The Bank last year disbursed loans totalling Tk 1600 crore among its 21 lakh members.

FH Abed, Executive Director of BRAC, said: "The rural life has become stagnant due to the present political stand-off. Every aspect of rural life—be it agriculture, livestock rearing or homestead gardening—has been paralysed, leading to a virtual halt."

"Thus our beneficiaries are failing to repay their loans while we are also failing to disburse credit," added Abed, whose organisation disburses about Tk 400 crore among the poor.

He said the lingering crisis would leave a serious impact on food availability. The crop situation is also bad due to price spiral of fertiliser and diesel.

Dwelling on the political impasse's impact on rural employment and poverty situation, Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Chairman of Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad, said, "The present crisis has led to a collapse of both economic management and economic activities in all sectors, particularly affecting

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Singer Cup was proposed to be held in Dhaka

Sports Reporter

The Singer Cup cricket beginning at Singapore on April 1 with World Champions Sri Lanka, 1992 World Champions Pakistan and 1983 Champions India, was originally proposed by the organisers to be played in Dhaka, sources concerned said.

The proposal was made about two years ago and the dream-competition did not materialise because the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB) wanting more control on the affair, and the organisers wanting to buy the right to stage the tourney in Dhaka, had failed to reach an understanding, they said.

(Details on page 7)

Non-cooperation resumes

By Staff Correspondent

The opposition political parties resumed their indefinite non-cooperation movement yesterday after a break of two days on the occasion of Independence Day.

At least five persons were injured in separate incidents of bomb blasts in the city yesterday, when the non-cooperation that began on March 9 resumed again.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami enforced the indefinite non-cooperation movement to press their identical demands for annulling the February 15 polls, resignation of the illegal government and holding of fresh elections by May under a neutral caretaker government.

During yesterday's demonstration some people were seen to have pulled down the portraits of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia from the offices of the National Sports Council and PWD, according to witnesses. The mob later marched with her portrait hanging brooms and shoes around its frame, they added.

Sporadic bomb blasts at College Gate, Meer Hajrighat,

Kallyanpur and Kalabagan left at least five persons injured. They were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), according to hospital sources.

In another incident, at least two persons, Sheikh Mohammad Selim and Arif Abed, were picked up by police while they were allegedly hurling cocktails at a state-owned double-decker bus at Mirpur Section 12. They were handed over to the Pabai thana.

A mob also set ablaze a town service passenger bus at Mahakhali at around noon, witnesses said. Later, the fire fighters from Tejgaon fire station extinguished the fire. The mob also ransacked at least a dozen vehicles including tempos, auto-rickshaws and minibuses at Farmgate, Airport Road, Mirpur Road and Tophkhana Road.

The opposition political parties followed out separate procession from different parts of the city besides holding rallies. The Jatiya Party and Jamaat also raised their separate podiums in the city yesterday.

Hartals, non-cooperation since Jan '96 Country remains paralysed for 33 out of 88 days

By Reaz Ahmad and Mizan Ali

Of the total 88 days of 1996, the country by and large remained paralysed for 33 days till yesterday, when the indefinite non-cooperation movement launched by the Opposition on March 9 resumed after two days break.

The number of working days lost due to workstoppages, hartals, non-cooperation and other agitation programmes this year, has surpassed the records of all recent anti-government agitations.

Awami League, Jatiya Party and Jamaat-e-Islami had been agitating for the last two years for installation of a caretaker government to hold the general elections.

The country has been witnessing frequent agitation programmes and work stoppages since the resignation of the Opposition MPs from the

Jatiya Sangsad (JS) on Dec. 28, 1994.

During the year 1995, the opposition political parties called hartal, barricade and non-cooperation programmes on at least 29 working days. These anti-government agitation programmes were observed at both national and district levels, ranging from 8 hours to 6 days at a stretch.

This, however, does not include the agitation calls given by the trade union organisations, and business and professional groups. In some areas the ruling party also called for hartals at the district level during that year.

This year's agitation programme called by the opposition political parties centred around resisting the February 15 elections. The agitations started soon after the polls schedule was announced.

As a result, the last date for submission of nomination papers was changed for the fourth time since the announcement of the election schedule.

In their bid to resist the elections, the agitating Opposition observed a countrywide dawn-to-dusk blockade of rail-road-waterways on February 13.

From the next day they also observed a 48-hour shut down covering the poll day on February 15.

Elections, however, were held on February 15 amidst widespread violence.

The opposition then announced a four and half-day non-cooperation programme from February 24-28 throughout the country demanding cancellation of the February 15 polls, while terming it as farcical.

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BTV officials won't telecast one-sided news

Sports Reporter

The Bangladesh Television Broadcasters' Welfare Association has decided not to telecast one-sided news and programme on the BTV, association sources said.

The association at a meeting with BTV Director General yesterday also urged him to take necessary steps for broadcasting objective and neutral news on the state-owned television.

DG Risalat Ahmed agreed with the call from the association grouping all producers, cameramen, engineers and designers of BTV, one of the association leaders told UNB.

High officials of the BTV were present during the meeting at National Broadcasting House at Shahbagh in the city at noon.

Arms seized in Cox's Bazar

Sports Reporter

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 28: Police detained two people, reportedly members of a Yangon-based international terrorists' racket, from a village in Ukha thana on Wednesday night, reports UNB.

They seized one SMG, a US-made gun and 18 rounds of bullets from Abul Khair, 30, of Ukha and Mohammad Zakaria, 26, of Anwara thana in Chittagong district.

The terrorists were arrested from Tai Palong village after they had reached there from Teknaf by an autorickshaw, police said.

Some 41 members of the same group were arrested with huge arms and ammunition on February 17 this year in a combined operation.

6 Indian policemen killed in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Mar 28: At least six Indian federal policemen were killed in a fierce gunbattle with separatist guerrillas in the insurgency-racked northern state of Jammu-Kashmir, police and witnesses said Thursday, reports AP.

The fighting occurred Wednesday in the town of Sopore, 50 kilometers (30 miles) north of Srinagar, the state's summer capital, police said.

A Border Security Force patrol had gone to the area to raid a suspected rebel hideout when it was met with a hail of gunfire. One rebel was killed in the fighting. One officer was among the six police casualties.

Police set fire to five small houses in the area during an intensive search operation that followed the fighting, residents said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Police said the houses caught fire during the exchange of fire and were not deliberately set ablaze.

In Srinagar, tension prevailed on Thursday as police prevented people from taking out a funeral procession carrying the body of murdered human rights activist, Jailed Andrab.

Relatives said Andrab was abducted by men wearing Indian army uniforms 19 days before his body was found on Wednesday. Official spokesmen have denied Indian forces were behind the disappearance.

International human rights monitors linked the kidnapping to army-backed Kashmiri militants who broke away from the pro-independence Jammu-Kashmir Liberation Front to fight their former allies.

Andrab was an open supporter of the group.

Police swung batons to disperse hundreds of people who wanted to march to the burial grounds in Srinagar, witnesses said. There were no reports of casualties. Later family members followed the hearse to the burial ground in cars.

3 succumb to injuries in city hospitals

By DMCH Correspondent
Three persons, including a woman, succumbed to their injuries in different hospitals in the city yesterday.

Suffa, 25, a garments worker, who received serious burn injuries in an attack on a passenger bus on Bijoy Sarani Monday, died at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday, hospital sources said.

The victim, wife of Osman Goni of Sukrabad, was going to her place of work at the time.

An unidentified gang threw petrol bombs at the bus which was carrying passengers from

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DCCI chief urges President to form caretaker govt

By Staff Correspondent
The chief of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI), Ali Hossain, has urged the President to take immediate steps to form a neutral caretaker government and free the nation from the economic and administrative deadlock.

Expressing deep concern over the losses incurred by industries and financial organisations due to the long political deadlock, he said in a statement yesterday that the effects of the economic losses would be felt in every sphere for a long time.

Many industries will not be able to absorb the shock and eventually become sick affecting other healthy linkage industries, he said.

The DCCI president further

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Rohingya refugees go on rampage

COX'S BAZAR, Mar 28: Four police constables were injured and a camp office was damaged when a group of unruly Rohingya refugees hurled stones at Gurdun refugee camp under Ukhiya thana here today, official sources said, reports BSS.

The angry refugees also held Havildar Zakir Hossain hostage for several hours.

The sources said that Rohingya refugees were demanding withdrawal of police and ansars, free movement outside the camp and better food.

The refugees also exploded several crackers outside the camp, the source said, adding some vested quarters were instigating the refugees to create a trouble.