

## AGITATION AROUND SECRETARIAT

# Govt slaps 24-hr ban to foil 14-party sit-in

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday imposed a ban on gathering near the Secretariat for 24 hours from this midnight to thwart the 14-party opposition combine's 11:00am-to-1:00pm sit-in programme tomorrow around the country's civil administration hub.

The government taking a hard line against the opposition programme has directed the home ministry to take strict security measures to prevent opposition men from rallying around the Secretariat at any cost.

On the other side, the Awami League-led combine in an impromptu meeting last night decried the ban imposed by Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) and expressed firm determination to stage the programme tomorrow,

disregarding the ban.

After the meeting at the AL's Dhanmondi office, AL General Secretary and opposition-combine coordinator Abdul Jalil told reporters if their leaders and workers face

government repression in tomorrow's programme, a stringent movement including general strike might be announced.

With Gono Forum leader Saifuddin Ahmed Manik in the

chair, the 14-party meeting resolved that their workers would stage sit-ins wherever they would be intercepted tomorrow on their way to the Secretariat.

Before moving towards the Secretariat, the AL-led opposition activists will gather at Matshya Bhaban, Kakrail, Dainik Bangla crossing, Shapla Chattar, Golap Shah Shrine and Shahbag intersection, sources said.

The opposition line-up announced the sit-in programme on March 12 to press home its demand for reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission. The combine leaders held an emergency meeting last night to set the next course of actions.

"If any barricade is put up or obstruction made to observing the

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## BGMEA starts crash programme to check factory accidents

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) yesterday launched a crash programme to prevent industrial accidents, particularly fire incidents, which tarnished the image of the industry.

"The readymade garment industry is now in a vulnerable situation," BGMEA President Tipu Munshi said while inaugurating the programme at the BGMEA office.

"Successful implementation of the programme will help revive the image of the industry," he hoped,

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# ADP to be slashed by 8pc on fund dearth

## High fuel bill, low revenue earning reasons

AGENCIES

The government will slash its Annual Development Programme (ADP) by 8 percent in the face of resource constraints caused by excessive spending on fuel oil and less revenue earning than expected.

BDNEWS says a review meeting on ADP implementation chaired by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday also decided to

take 25 new projects, including 6 revised ones, for implementation in the current fiscal year.

"We are going to reduce current ADP for lack of the revenue resources," Saifur told reporters after the meeting held at the NEC conference room.

"We are taking new projects on the basis of priority, especially in agriculture, infrastructure, power and textile sectors," he added.

The minister laid emphasis on

speedy implementation of the projects in infrastructure sector and said only foreign-aided projects would be squeezed.

UNB says the priority projects selected for implementation in this fiscal year will be taken to the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) for approval.

"Resources from the poorly

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## BB asks banks to report on militants' accounts

### Sends list of 68 militants

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank (BB) has sent a list of 68 militants to all the commercial banks to find if they have any bank accounts, sources said.

The central bank asked the banks to report within April 6 all sorts of transactions in detail if any bank account is found in their names.

Sources in the BB said the list, which was sent early this week, bears the addresses of some of the arrested and suspected militants.

The central bank gathered the names and addresses from newspaper reports.

The list includes names of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) chief Abdul Rahman, his second-in-command Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhai, Ataur Rahman Sunny, Abdul Awal, Obaidur Rahman,

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## Pak commerce minister arrives April 19

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The commerce minister of Pakistan will make a three-day visit to Dhaka from April 19 to attend the Safta Ministerial Council (SMC) meeting and initiate talks on signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh.

Minister Humayun Akhtar Khan will discuss with the government leaders and high-ups the signing of the FTA by September 30 this year, official sources said.

The signing of the FTA will be in compliance with an accord signed between the two countries during Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit to Islamabad in late February.

Pakistan has preferred settling the FTA issue to go for enhancement of bilateral trade.

Bangladesh suffered trade

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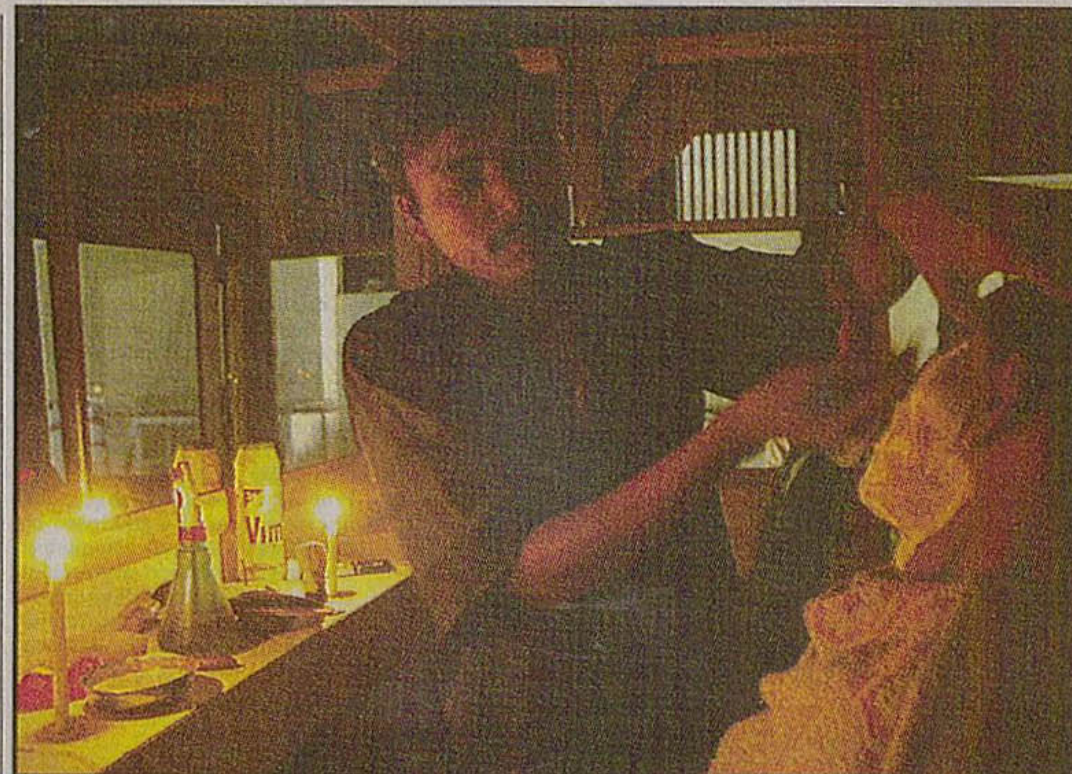


PHOTO: STAR

A barber shaves a man by candlelight at Tophkhana in the city yesterday. Frequent load-shedding is disrupting life for the past few days.

# Experts doubt EC's ability to hold polls

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Considering the prevailing situation in the Election Commission (EC), experts yesterday doubted its ability to hold the next parliamentary election.

Crises in the EC are deepening over voter list preparation, appointment of two new election commissioners and the latest contempt charge against the chief election commissioner (CEC) himself.

With the next general elections only nine months away, the EC has not taken steps to strengthen its mechanism to check the influence of black money and muscle power in the upcoming elections.

A deadlock prevails in the EC, observed M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to caretaker government.

"A new election commission should be formed, comprising efficient people acceptable to all, as I think it's not possible to hold the next election by the present commission," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Holding an election is a very tough job. The commission will have to do many tasks. I don't see this efficiency in the present set-up," he elaborated, adding, "The present election commission has fallen in an enormous controversy, to which I see no sign of ending."

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday,

day, Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali said the way the EC is functioning has raised some questions in the public mind about the commission's neutrality and transparency.

"The present Election Commission has yet to gain public confidence that it will be able to conduct the next election in a free and fair manner," he said, adding that the EC should be comprised of people who are able to maintain neutrality and transparency.

A new EC should immediately be formed, as time is running out fast, another former adviser to caretaker government, wishing anonymity, told The Daily Star

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## India confirms more bird flu cases

REUTERS, Mumbai

India reported new cases of bird flu in nearly 200 villages in Maharashtra, the site of two earlier outbreaks this year, officials said.

The virus was suspected to be the H5N1 strain and tests were underway on samples from the birds, they said.

The latest outbreak was reported from Maharashtra's Jalgaon district, which also reported the country's second set of infections of H5N1 earlier this month.

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## Biman flight stranded for technical fault

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

One hundred and sixty-eight passengers remained stranded for above five hours as a Biman Airbus could not take off from Osmani International Airport last night due to technical faults.

The passengers were later flown to the capital at midnight by another Airbus brought from Dhaka.

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## Headmaster 'rapes' class V student

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

A student of class five was raped allegedly by her school's headmaster in Sundargram in Rajarhat upazila on Monday.

Sources said Md Mokhesur Rahman, headmaster of Sundargram Panchayat Govt Primary School, called the student in to his office and raped her during class hours.

Hearing the news, locals besieged the school, confined the teacher and demanded his stern punishment.

Mokhes was however rescued by activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, student wing of ruling BNP, before he was handed over to police, witnesses said.

The girl was sent to Kurigram General Hospital.

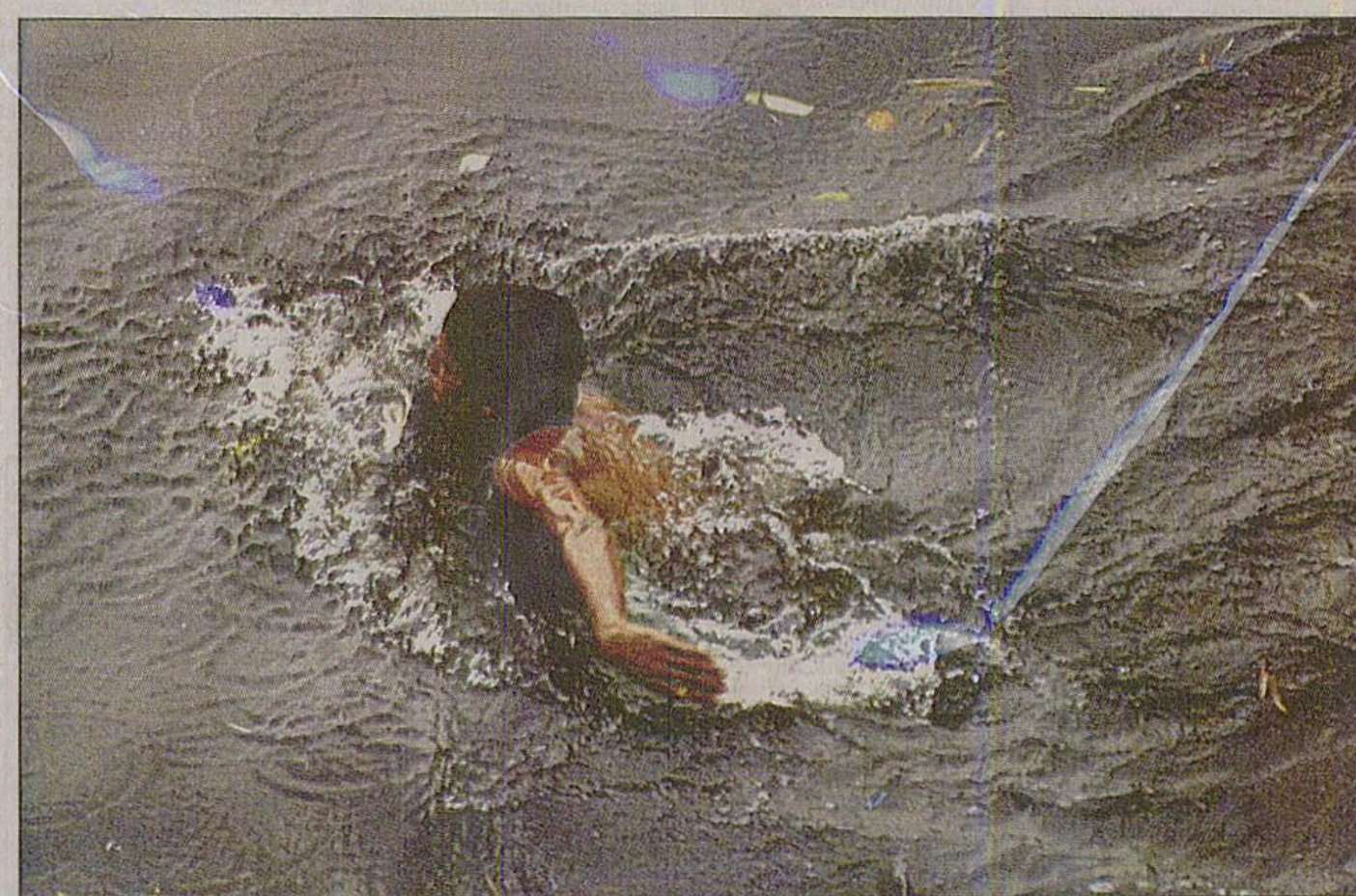


PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Factory waste and sewerage water are increasingly polluting the gradually dying Buriganga river where people bathe, wash clothes and utensils in its highly contaminated, stinky and black water. This leads to outbreaks of skin and other waterborne diseases among people living along the banks.

# Carjackers on the prowl

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Carjacking has increased significantly in and around the capital since the law enforcement agencies are too preoccupied with chasing the Islamist militants following the August 17 country-wide bomb attacks, say taxicab and autorickshaw drivers.

While the stolen CNG-run three-wheelers are sold back to their owners, the taxicabs and private cars find their way to some specific showrooms for sale in completely new looks.

On March 9, six youths hired a black cab from Sayedabad in the capital to go to Comilla.

On reaching the Gomoti river in Comilla, Yasin, Anwar, Masum and Munna—four of the gang members

posing as passengers—murdered the cab driver, whose identity is yet to be determined, and buried the dead body on the bank.

The police became suspicious to see car-lifters trying to sell the cab off in Comilla town.

They apprehended the culprits and the whole incident came to light. The dead body of the cab driver was disinterred on March 12.

According to sources, there are around 20 such gangs operating in Dhaka and adjacent areas.

A gang led by one Muslim is based in Mir Hazirbagh while two groups led by Kabir and Shahid operate in Dholaikhal, and a Tamu group led by Tamujuddin in Badda.

based in Mirpur 11, the Chally group in Maghbazar, and the Jamal group in Shekheret of Mohammadpur. Two groups operate in Narayanganj: the Bayal group, also known as Naju group, and the Pandit group. A few gangs that have emerged recently steal private cars.

The Pandit group is believed to have been in the "trade" since 1980.

The Akkas group has eight female members who act as passengers mainly in Uttara, Banani, Ashulia and airport areas and hire a taxi or a three-wheeler. They take the vehicle to a predetermined place in Konabari where the other gang members "finish" the job.

The Tamu group has three gangs operating in Mohakhali Wireless

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## Govt approves \$1b investment offer by Saudi hotel chain

AFP, Dhaka

The Bangladesh cabinet yesterday approved an offer by Kingdom Hotels Investments to spend as much as \$1 billion to build hotels and resorts in the country, a government statement said.

The cabinet, led by Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, discussed a KHI proposal to invest in Hotel Sonargaon and also approved its plans to build new hotels, the statement said.

Saudi tycoon Prince Alwaleed bin Talal, who owns a majority stake in KHI, visited Bangladesh last November and made a formal

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