

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 11:00 am-to-1:00 pm 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 Dhammudi 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.

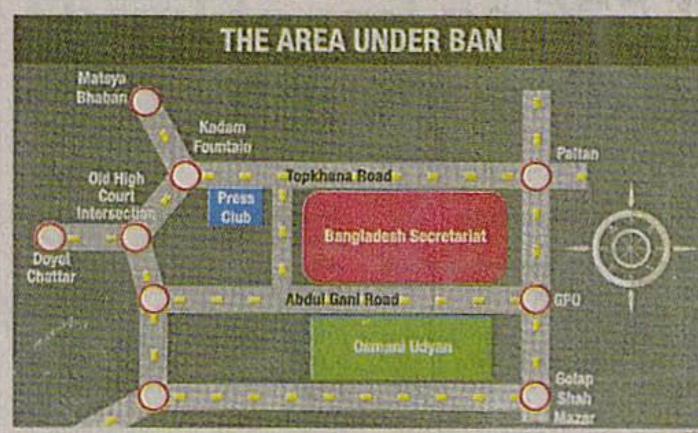
Before moving towards the Secretariat, the AL-led opposition activists will gather at Matsya Bhawan, Kakrail, Dainik Bangla crossing, Shapla Chhatar, Golap Shah Shrine and Shabbag intersection, sources said.

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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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.

BDDNEWS 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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Shahiduzzaman

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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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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

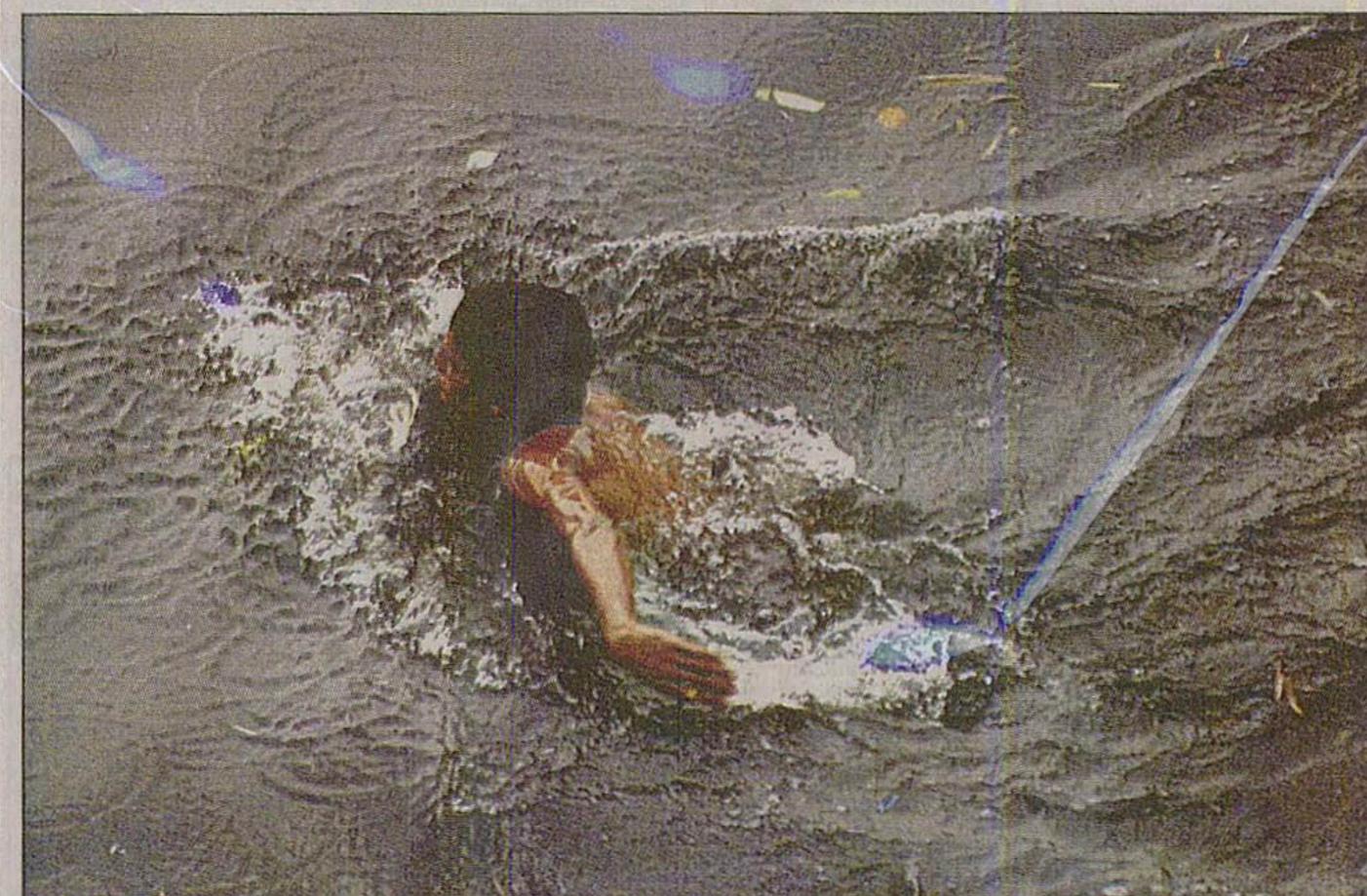
OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kurigram

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

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

Mokhles was however rescued by activists of Jatiyatabdhi Chhatri Dal, student wing of ruling BNP, before he was handed over to police, witness said.

The girl was sent to Kurigram General Hospital.



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, says taxi 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 Mirpur 11, the Chali group in Maghbazar, and the Jamai group in Shekher tek of Mohammadpur. Two groups operate in Narayanganj: the Beyai 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, Ahsanullah 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

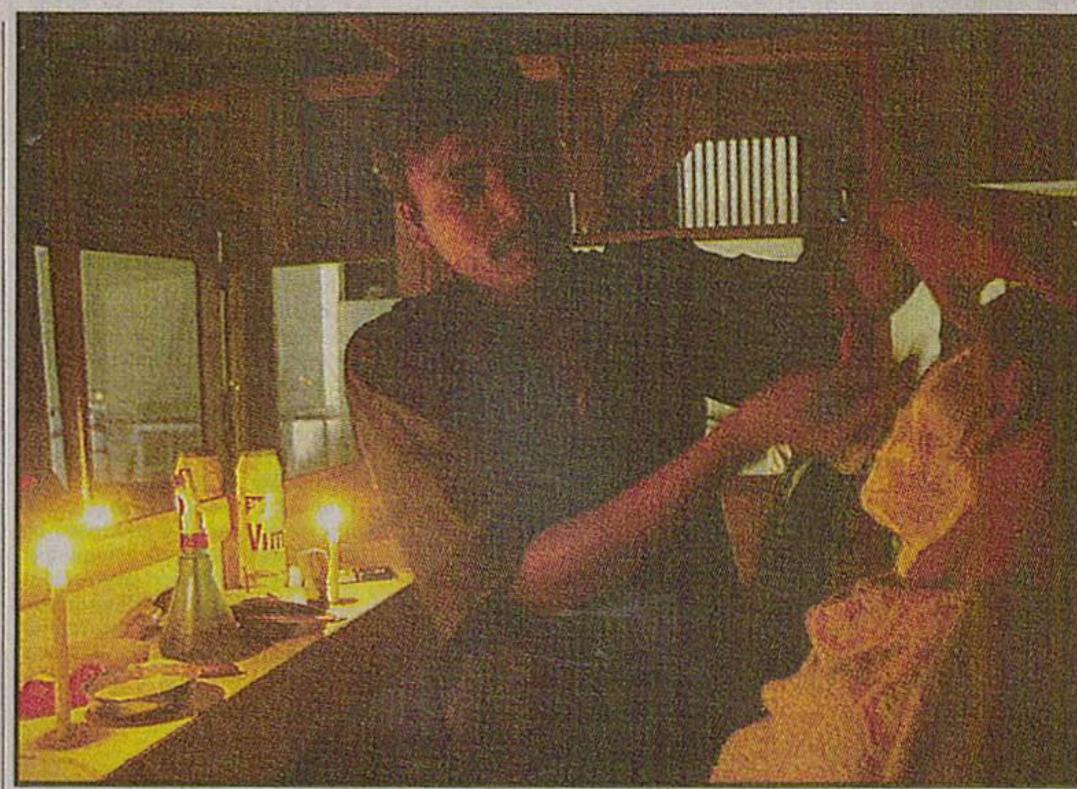
AFP, Dhaka

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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A barber shaves a man by candlelight at Topkhana 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.

"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

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.

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 yesterday

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Shanta now fears 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shahin Sultana Shanta, victim of the March 12 police brutality during a protest programme of the 14-party alliance, suspects "false" cases are being filed against her to kill her in "crossfire".

"After filing 10 such false cases, the Rapid Action Battalion will be used to kill me in crossfire," Shanta told a press conference organised by the women lawyers of Bangladesh Supreme Court at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

Still reeling from the shocks she had endured during the police torture, she urged the prime minister to take measures against those police personnel who tortured her.

Meantime, a Division bench of the High Court (HC) yesterday issued a rule nisi on the government to show cause in two weeks as to why criminal and departmental actions should not be taken against the police officials who brutally tortured Shanta.

The court also asked the government not to harass or arrest Shanta without judicial inquiry into any case filed against her.

Shanta yesterday gave deposition to a metropolitan magistrate in the second case she has filed against two deputy commissioners (DC) of police, a constable and 25 other unnamed policemen and policewomen.

HC RULE

Following a writ petition filed by Shanta, the HC Division bench comprising Justice Awlad Ali and Justice Zinat Ara directed the law enforcement agencies not to arrest or harass Shanta in any way and enter the house of her or her family.

On March 22, Metropolitan Magistrate AJM Abdullahe Baqui dismissed the case saying that the victim was murdered at Savar but the case was filed showing the place of occurrence (PO) as Kotwali in Dhaka.

Iman Ali, 40, was killed during a "shootout" between Rapid Action Battalion and police in Dhaka.

The court fixed May 5 for hearing on the acceptability of the charges brought against the accused in the case.

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Iman Ali, 40, was killed during a "shootout" between Rapid Action Battalion and police in Dhaka.

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One Time Paint for Many Seasons

BERGER
Weather Coat
SMOOTH ACRYLIC

• Anti-fungal
• Anti-fading
• Anti-flaking

THE SCIENCE OF WEATHERPROOFING