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Speaker to join IPU assembly with parliament not in place

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speaker of the Parliament Jamiruddin Sircar is set to depart for South Africa today to attend the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Assembly accompanied by his personal staff, although the country currently has no parliament.

The speaker earlier approved reallocation of Tk 30 lakh in the Parliament Secretariat's annual budget to meet the travel expenditure, since the entire original itemised allocation of Tk 54 lakh in the current budget under a title 'sending of delegations' had already been spent.

Abdul Hamid, a former speaker, questioned the need for Sircar's presence at the IPU assembly in absence of a parliament in the country. "I don't see any need for participating in the IPU assembly

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Essentials get costlier

Rice prices decline in wholesale markets

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The wholesale price of rice slumped for the third consecutive day, without making any impact on retail markets in the capital as of yesterday.

In the meantime, prices of onion, potato and milk powder have been witnessing a rising trend during the last couple of days.

Against the backdrop of soaring prices of essentials, people belonging to the middle and lower income group continue to pour into the open market sale (OMS) outlets and fair price outlets of Bangladesh Rifles (BDR).

Meanwhile, the BDR said it would set up 25 more fair price outlets in the capital by Sunday.

"We shall be able to sell rice to about 50,000 to 1 lakh people at the new 25 outlets a day at a fair price," BDR Sector Commander Col

Mojibul Hoque told reporters at a news briefing at the BDR headquarters.

"We hope to sell about 200-300 tonnes of rice a day to the poor and lower middle class people at the 25 outlets at a fair price," he said.

Col Mojibul said other items would also be sold at the outlets at a cheaper price.

At present, the number of BDR-run outlets in the capital stands at 50 where about 600 tonnes of rice are sold to about one lakh people a day.

Earlier, BDR had set up five wholesale kitchen markets at Gabtali, Uttara sector-6 and 2, Jatrabari and Sahidnagar in the city.

The wholesale prices of different varieties of coarse rice came down further, by Tk 20 per maund yesterday. A maund of coarse rice was selling from Tk 1,230 to Tk

1,290 at city wholesale markets yesterday. The same varieties were sold for Tk 1,250 to Tk 1,310 a maund the day before.

Nizam Uddin, general secretary of Babubazar and Badamtoli Rice Wholesalers' Association, told The Daily Star that the prices of different varieties of coarse rice fell by Tk 40 to Tk 60 per maund in the last three days.

Sufficient supply and plummeting sales are the primary reasons behind the declining prices and it is unlikely that the prices would go up again in the coming days, he added.

Wholesalers at different markets said the supply of rice increased all on a sudden in the last couple of days.

Wishing anonymity, a few wholesalers at Babubazar and Krishni Market at Mohammadpur in

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Where going hungry is the only other option

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

"I can manage my four year old boy with false promises of food later, but how can I make my three-month old understand that he has to wait for food?"

Hasina, who has been going hungry regularly for days now, asks the question in desperation.

Wiping tears away from her eyes, Hasina says she can live through her own hunger but cannot bear her babies' crying out of hunger.

The 30-year-old mother fled her village in Gaibandha with her ailing husband to escape the burden of loans they took to mainly feed the family.

Today she collects scrap paper from the streets for a living and

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Visiting British Home Secretary Jacqui Smith with Chief Adviser Dr Fakhruddin Ahmed at his office in the city yesterday.

EASING GRIDLOCK 2-hr pause in train services through city from Apr 14

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway (BR) will suspend its train services for nearly two hours during the morning and evening rush hours every day in the capital from April 14 to help ease traffic congestion.

All train services, except for a few commuter trains, will remain suspended from 8:00am to 9:00am and 4:50pm to 6:00pm once the new scheme is implemented.

The BR authorities will have to reschedule the timing of around 14 trains in the eastern zone as per the proposed schedule, railway officials said.

The step comes from the railway following repeated requests from police at a time when traffic congestion in the city has turned into a complete mess.

With 72 trains arriving at and departing from Kamalapur Railway Station every day, each of the 18 level crossings in the city experiences a total traffic halt for over six

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Rickshaw pullers topple traffic cones on city's Kakrail-Shantinagar road flouting demarcation of rickshaw lanes.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

PROBE REPORT ON FEB 28 LAUNCH ACCIDENT Overloading, unskilled masters key reasons

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday made public the probe report on February 28 launch accident in the Buriganga, which identified lack of skill of masters of the launch and the sand-carrying barge that collided, and over loading and faulty construction of the launch as main causes of the accident.

This is for the first time a government-formed probe body's report on launch accident has been published.

Captain AKM Shafiqullah, director general (DG) of the Department of Shipping (DOS),

presented the report at a press conference at his office more than a month after it was submitted to the shipping ministry.

The report also blamed the sukani (assistant to the master) of the barge MV Al-Amin and its machine operator, and the owner of the passenger launch MV Shourav-1 for the accident that claimed at least 49 lives as the launch sank.

Gross irregularities and negligence of duty of an inspector and berthing sareng (helmsmen) of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) and two surveyors and an inspector of

the DOS also contributed to the tragic accident, the report.

"We have already started taking action against the persons found guilty of the accident, and have taken initiative to implement recommendations of the probe committee," Shafiqullah told the press conference.

The government on February 28 formed the five-member probe committee, headed by joint secretary of the shipping ministry Abdul Matin, to find out the causes of the accident, people responsible for it and recommend measures to prevent recurrence of such

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UNREST IN DEPZ Factory closed for indefinite period

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The authorities of Experience Clothing Company Ltd yesterday officially declared its factory in Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) at Savar closed for an indefinite period following worker violence the day before.

Yesterday morning, a notice reading "The factory will remain closed for an indefinite period until further notice" was posted in front of the factory, said sources at the DEPZ.

On Tuesday, the operation of the Pakistan-based garment factory ground to a halt as its workers clashed over various grievances including non-payment of overtime, inadequate transportation

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Violence rocks Nepal ahead of today's polls

Seven Maoists, one protester shot dead

AFP, Kathmandu

Police in Nepal have shot dead seven Maoists and a protester, the party said yesterday, in the worst outbreak of violence ahead of a high-stakes and tense vote on the Himalayan nation's political future.

The Maoists, who are campaigning for Nepal's god-king Gyanendra to be ousted and the monarchy to be immediately abolished after Thursday's elections, were killed during clashes with supporters of a rival party.

But rebel leader Prachanda, who has accused elements of the

security forces of plotting to undermine the elections in order to save the king, made an appeal for calm.

"The need of the hour is to show restraint and have a fair and free election," he said in a statement after meeting with Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala.

Seven Maoists were killed and 13 injured Tuesday night in police firing," said Balram Yadav, a senior police officer from rural western Dang district.

Police shot at the Maoists after fighting with workers from the rival Nepali Congress spiralled out of control, the officer said.

In other violence, an election

candidate was assassinated late Tuesday in the west of the country, while the capital and the ethnically tense south have been rocked by small bombings.

The polls will mark the climax of a peace process that ended the Maoists' decade-long war, which left at least 13,000 dead, and result in the creation of a 601-seat assembly that will rewrite the constitution and likely oust King Gyanendra.

But even though the Maoists have put their hardened jungle and mountain fighters into United Nations-monitored camps and

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AL, allies want to make women policy a law

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of Awami League (AL) and its allies in the 14-party yesterday said they will pass a bill on the National Women Development Policy in parliament if they are elected in the next election.

"We made National Women Development Policy in 1997 when we were in power, but unfortunately, could not pass it in parliament. The caretaker government has prepared the present policy based on our policy. If we win the next general election, we will pass it in parliament," AL Presidium Member Abdul Razzak said at a view-exchange meeting on the National Women Development Policy 2008.

General Secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) Hasanul

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ILL-GOTTEN WEALTH ACC presses charges against Aminul Haque

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) yesterday pressed charges against former post and telecommunications minister Barrister Aminul Haque in a case for amassing wealth illegally.

Meanwhile, former BNP

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Prayer Timing		
April 10		
Fajr	Azan	Jamaat
4:35	4:35	5:10
Zohr	12:45	1:15
Asr	4:45	5:00
Maghrib	6:24	6:28
Esha	7:45	8:15

Source: Islamic Foundation

N Korea strikes deal with US on nuke declaration

AFP, Seoul

North Korea said yesterday it has reached agreement with the United States on its promised nuclear declaration, an issue that has blocked progress in a six-nation disarmament deal.

A foreign ministry spokesman quoted by state media said the two sides, during talks in Singapore Tuesday, also agreed on "political compensation" from Washington.

The North demands that the US start the process of removing it from a list of state sponsors of terrorism, in return for a declaration.

"As a result of the talks, a consensus was reached on the US

measure to make political compensation and the nuclear declaration essential for winding up the implementation of the agreement," the unidentified spokesman was quoted by the communist state's Korean Central News Agency as saying.

US negotiator Christopher Hill said in Beijing Wednesday his talks with his counterpart Kim Kye-Gwan in Singapore had "definitely made progress" on the declaration.

"I don't want to suggest there has been any major breakthrough. But as the days go by, we'll be announcing some efforts to try to move ahead," Hill added.

The 2007 disarmament deal

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Seven killed in clashes in Karachi

AFP, Karachi

Seven people were killed and dozens of cars and buildings were torched during clashes between supporters and opponents of Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf in Karachi yesterday, police said.

Police officers found the charred bodies of five lawyers, including a woman, inside their burned-out office in the port city, while the other two were shot dead in crossfire between the warring factions, they said.

It is the first political violence since Musharraf's allies were trounced in elections in February, bringing to power a hostile coalition government led by the party of slain opposition leader Benazir Bhutto.

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A notice at a CNG filling station, at Dainik Bangla junction in the city yesterday, announces service stoppage due to power outage. CNG run vehicles quite often wait in long queues for hours at filling stations during outages.

PHOTO: STAR

EVICION DRIVE Magistrate, cops hurt in attack

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A magistrate and two policemen were injured when the henchmen of a ward commissioner of Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) assaulted them during an eviction drive at Lalbagh in the city yesterday.

Magistrate Khalilur Ahmed, Sub-Inspector Harun-ur-Rashid and Constable Enamul Huq received minor injuries during the incident.

Police and witnesses said the law enforcers came under attack as they went to knock down illegal structures built by commissioner of 65 no. ward Mohammad Sohailul Islam Babul on a piece of city corporation land at Ershadnagar of Islambagh under Lalbagh Police Station.

"The henchmen of Babul commissioner also held the magistrate

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