

Hartal in CHT ends quietly

STAR REPORT

A dawn-to-dusk hartal in the three districts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) called by Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) was observed yesterday by and large peacefully.

Reports received in Dhaka said only in Khagrachhari some stray incidents of violence occurred leaving a child bullet-injured.

The hartal passed off peacefully in Rangamati and Bandarban.

Army and police were deployed across the CHT region to avert untoward incidents.

The PCJSS called the hartal to press its demands for removal of the chairman of the CHT Development Board, full implementation of the CHT peace accord, removal of temporary army camps from the CHT region and appointment of a full indigenous minister for the CHT affairs ministry.

Our Khagrachhari correspondent reported that activists of the PCJSS and United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) had gunfights at five places in the district.

A boy named Jewel Tripura at the district town was seriously injured as stray bullets hit him.

The other incidents took place at Giriful of Mahalchhari and Pankhahyapara, Khagrapur and Tokaichhari of Rangarh.

Hundreds of PCJSS activists picketed in support of the hartal on different roads in the district town.

Some shops remained open

during the hartal in Babuchhara, Kopakhali, Pujgang and Bizitali area as the UPDF is strong in those areas.

Shops remained open in those areas in five upazilas including Matrang, Ramgarh, Manikchhari and Panchhari and in Shapla Chatter area of the town, which have many Bangalee inhabitants.

PCJSS leaders held a rally after the hartal and asked the government to accept its demands.

Our Rangamati correspondent reported that hartal was observed there without any violence.

General Secretary of the PCJSS Chandra Shekhar Chakma announced at a rally that they would go for a fresh programme in January if the government did not implement the peace accord by December 31.

The rally was held at the Court building premises. The PCJSS' student wing Pahari Chhatra Parishad and Hill Women's Federation also took part in the hartal. Bangladesh Students Union and the Original and Old Bangalee Welfare Association also supported it.

Meanwhile, the Parbatya Bangalee Students Organisation held a rally protesting the hartal and demanded removal of PCJSS chief Shantul Larma.

Our Bandarban correspondent also reported that the hartal was peaceful.

The PCJSS and Parbatya Bangalee Gana Parishad held separate rallies.

Three female NGO workers rescued after seven hours

BSS, Cox's Bazar

A joint team of police and Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) yesterday rescued three female workers of a non-governmental organisation (NGO) from a deep forest in Naikhyanchhari upazila of Bandarban district after seven hours of their abduction.

The airport police produced Shoib before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate at 3:30pm with a forwarding report.

In the report, police said the written speech that Shoib was supposed to read out at a seminar in Tel Aviv proved beyond doubt that he has been involved in anti-state activities for long.

Police also said different faxed and e-mailed messages seized from Shoib's possession confirmed that he passed sensitive information out of the country.

A project profile, seeking a fund of Tk 12 crore from Jews in Israel, was also seized from him. He sought the fund to publish three

Prosecution witnesses give deposition in Sujan murder

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Five metropolitan magistrates of Dhaka, prosecution witnesses in former BNP lawmaker Shahjahan Howlader Sujan murder case, gave their depositions before a court yesterday.

Jahangir Alam Mollah of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4, Dhaka Division, recorded the statements of Shafiq Anwar, Abdul Haq, Jagannath Das Khokon, Khondaker Fatema Begum and Quamrunnahr for about two hours. They were also cross-examined by defence lawyers.

During the hearing, the witnesses told the court that they recorded statements of five witnesses on different days when the case was being probed.

The court earlier recorded statements of 48 prosecution witnesses, including Hena Akhter, mother of the victim.

Sujan, 35, lawmaker for Brahmanbaria-6 and former vice-president of Haji Mohammad Mohsin Hall Students Union of Dhaka University (DU), was abducted by his rivals.

He was found dead near Doyel Chatter on the DU campus on July 3, 2001.

Sujon's mother filed an abduction case with Motijheel Police Station accusing BNP leader Rausan Alam and four others the same day.

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) pressed charges against Rausan and 11 others on July 9 this year.

Accused Alam and six others are now out on bail and five are at large since the killing.

The court adjourned the hearing till today.

Nepalese PM

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hold meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on December 18.

"Apart from Saarc, bilateral issues, including trade and road transit between Dhaka and Kathmandu, might figure in the meeting of the two prime ministers," said Paudel.

Thapa will call on President. Iajuddin Ahmed. Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan may call on the Nepali prime minister during his stay.

The Saarc chairperson will leave Dhaka on December 19 for Singapore en route to the Maldives on the last leg of his visit to the capitals of the seven South Asian nations.

Earlier, he visited India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Bhutan.

AL scans

FROM PAGE 12

The ALCWC meeting amid rifle intra-party feud over committee formation in Laxmipur, Purbo Dhala in Netrokona and also in Netrokona Pourasabha, is likely to put emphasis on completion of all district and thana councils by mid-January despite the odds.

The AL wants to form all its units soon to put its own house in order ahead of its anti-government movement.

DU admission

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The price hike of Tk 50 was withdrawn, changing admission form prices from Tk 300 to Tk 250 for 2003-4 session.

This followed protests by various student organisations. Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of Awami League, Pragatishil Chhatra Jote, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and the Samajtantrik Chhatra Front (SCF) yesterday held separate programmes demanding immediate withdrawal of the price rise.

The BCL held a rally and laid siege to the vice-chancellor's office.

The DU authorities also decided to allow admission seekers to sit for tests in maximum three units, including the newly introduced 'Uma' unit. Admission forms for first year Honours classes for 2003-04 will be available from today at different bank branches on DU campus.

Shoib Chy sent to jail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Salauddin Shoib Chowdhury, arrested from Zia International Airport (ZIA) November 29 for his alleged Mossad connection was sent to jail yesterday on completion of a seven-day remand.

The airport police produced Shoib before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate at 3:30pm with a forwarding report.

In the report, police said the written speech that Shoib was supposed to read out at a seminar in Tel Aviv proved beyond doubt that he has been involved in anti-state activities for long.

Police also said different faxed and e-mailed messages seized from Shoib's possession confirmed that he passed sensitive information out of the country.

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US soldier killed in Iraq

AP, Baghdad

A US soldier was killed Monday outside a gas station in an apparent drive-by shooting in northern Iraq, the US military said.

The attack on the soldier from the US Army's 101st Airborne Division occurred in the city of Mosul, Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said at a news briefing in Baghdad.

Earlier Monday, witnesses in Mosul, about 250 miles north of Baghdad, said dozens of US troops cordoned off the city's central neighbourhood of al-Muthana, inspecting cars and searching people walking in the streets. At least three helicopters flew overhead at low altitude.

"We are looking for bad guys," a soldier said without elaborating.

In Mosul yesterday, a soldier from the 101st Airborne Division died and two others in his unit were wounded when rebels detonated a bomb as their convoy drove by.

The US military said troops north of Baghdad on also Monday seized \$1.9 million in cash and false identification documents in a raid targeting the suspected financier of insurgents.

US troops in Samarra seized the cash and arrested one person in the operation Sunday, said Maj. Josslyn Aberle, spokeswoman for the 4th Infantry Division.

"They didn't catch the original target but they detained one of his relatives and seized the money," Aberle said.

Samarra, some 70 miles north of Baghdad, was the site of heavy fighting Nov. 30 between Iraqi guerrillas and US soldiers who were delivering new Iraqi currency to local banks.

Sikder, 4 others

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The accused prayed for bail saying they were supposed to leave for Dhaka by a GMC flight at 9:20am. But as they missed the flight, Zahedul, also the agent of Volvo cars, rang up his Dhaka office and asked for a private chopper.

They said they entered the restricted area while waiting for the chopper with permission from the on-duty security personnel and that the firearms seized from them were properly licensed.

Magistrate Shafiqul Islam rejected their bail prayer and sent them to jail. He also turned down their request for return of the firearms seized from their vehicle.

Police and airport security seized a pistol, a gun, 20 pistol bullets and 80 gun cartridges from a bag found inside the Pajero jeep at the airport parking lot.

Airport authorities suspended four security personnel who were on duty at the entry points of the restricted area during the security breach.

The court fixed December 18 as the next date for hearing of a case filed in connection with the incident. The magistrate also ordered for all the relevant documents of the firearms to be produced before the court for scrutiny on that day.

Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB) formed a high-powered probe committee led by an official with the status of a joint secretary. The committee members are scheduled to arrive in Chittagong today to begin investigation into Sunday's incident.

Meanwhile, journalists waiting on the premises of the metropolitan magistrate's court to cover the

Govt's plea to newspapers

BSS, Dhaka

The Cabinet Division yesterday asked all dailies to publish confirmed reports on decisions taken at cabinet meetings after the government issues press releases on the outcome of those meetings.

Some newspapers are publishing unconfirmed reports on cabinet meetings containing information eluding the government press briefings, a press release of the Cabinet Division said.

"As a result confusion is created in public mind," it added.

dailies -- Dainik Sonali Din, Dainik Rupantar and Dainik Paribartan.

Shoib was trying to portray Bangladesh as a nationalist and an extremist nation abroad, said police, claiming that he has hot links with the international criminals.

Police are in the process of filing three cases on charge of sedition, violation of the Official Secrecy Act and obtaining of forbidden visa of Israel.

The defence lawyers moved a bail petition saying Shoib was being charged with sedition as part of a conspiracy to harass him.

The prosecution argued that Shoib was involved in anti-state activities and trying to portray Bangladesh a fundamentalist and an extremist nation.

Upon hearing both sides, Magistrate Shafiq Anwar rejected the bail petition and ordered that Shoib be sent to Dhaka Central Jail. The court also asked the investigation officer to submit a report within seven days after filing the regular cases against Shoib.

AL leader

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BNP, was on his way home from a local market when a group of unidentified men stabbed him at Shat Matha Road.

He was rushed to the hospital in a critical condition where he died in the early hours of yesterday.

A case was filed with the local police station. No-one was arrested.

19 more robbers

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Chora and Jahangir Dakat gangs still holed up in their forest dens would come out soon as their supply lines were cut.

Police seized two locally made guns and a huge cache of lethal weapons from Urir Char and other areas yesterday.

Locals said villagers in the area were incensed as robbers often raided their houses at night and picked up young women or raped them in front of their relatives alongside looting their cash and valuables.

"The sufferings of villagers hit the nadir at the beginning of rice harvest when the gangs forced them to pay Tk 800 to Tk 1,000 in cash an acre," the DC said.

He said that the gangs also felled trees on 47,000 acres in the coastal forest.

The home ministry last night said police reinforcements were dispatched to the areas to ensure the arrest of gangsters.

Law enforcers in nearby districts were put on alert, a home ministry official said.

Minister snubs

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capture the Nakhhalpara Ahmadiyya Mosque on November 20 and over 1,000 anti-Ahmadiyyas attacked policemen, guarding the mosque, the following day, injuring at least 50 people, including 18 law enforcers.

Mosharef told The Daily Star by telephone that the crisis must be ironed out through talks, adding: "I believe in tolerance and I am thinking of holding talks with leaders of the agitating anti-Ahmadiyya group soon."

Acknowledging the sect's right to religious practice, he said the Ahmadiyyas, as citizens, are entitled to protection by the government from attackers.

"The government is providing them with round-the-clock protection," Mosharef said with a promise of taking more steps.

Tareq Mobasser, a spokesman for Ahmadiyyas, said, "Although many of our people died, fled or were driven out of home and our mosques and property were damaged, we are grateful to the government for protection it gave us."

"But police protection is not a permanent solution. The problem should be resolved to the core," he said.

Mobasser asked the government to identify the instigators of violence against Ahmadiyyas and said: "Otherwise the situation will spiral out of control."

Eight Ahmadiyyas were killed, hundreds were evicted from their lands and at least 15 of their mosques vandalised across the country since 1985.

Rail staff

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going to work.

The mob also stopped a Santahar-bound train from leaving the station at 2:00pm. The DTS finally gave in to the hoodlums' demand and issued orders for reinstatement of the two suspended employees.

Police and railway authorities assumed a passive role during the whole incident, sources said.

Major cabinet

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sizing of the 53-strong council of ministers.

The council of ministers was trimmed down to 53 from 60 when three cabinet ministers and four state ministers were relieved on May 22.

Some senior ministers even offered to resign from the cabinet to help the prime minister bring down the number of the council to 40 to 45, the PMO sources said.

"I told the prime minister that I am ready to volunteer my resignation should she feel shy to drop some cabinet members," a senior minister told The Daily Star on condition of anonymity yesterday.

The speculations over an impending cabinet reshuffle have left several ministers wary of losing their portfolio. Some junior ministers are also keeping their fingers crossed.

According to sources, the panicky ministers and state ministers are jockeying with the PMO, the Hawa Bhaban -- BNP's alternative power centre -- senior ministers and influential party leaders.

Several BNP policymakers felt the need for an immediate reshuffle in the cabinet as the prime minister has already received resignation letters of over a dozen ministers.

Housing ministry

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stay at the same office for years, they strike roots and spread corruption. So, if we want to uproot corruption, the service rules must be observed."

"Some officials are staying at the same office for more than 20 years. If they are transferred, they come back after a few months 'managing' their senior officials," BNP member of the committee Joynal Abedin told this correspondent.

Committee member Sultan Mahmud Babu of the BNP also expressed similar views.

Officials of the housing ministry told the meeting there are more than 800 engineers in the PWD across the country.

Baghdad mission

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embassies in Baghdad while some other missions have dropped their staff drastically, the state minister said quoting a recent message from Mollah.

Missions of Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam at ambassadorial level have not been reopened after the war. The embassies of Pakistan and the Philippines have been downsized to charge d' affaires level with minimum staff.

Although embassies, except for countries participating with the coalition forces, are not targets of attacks, there were some recent threats of attack on Bangladesh embassy, the faxed message sent from Baghdad said.

Recently, abduction incidents have also shot up in Baghdad. Rich businessmen, especially from the Christian community, appear to be the main targets. Availability of illegal arms has made the city virtually a haven for criminals and reports of secret killings have become a routine phenomenon, it added.

Acid attacks may be tried in speedy tribunals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will consider dealing with acid attacks under the Speedy Trial Tribunal for quick disposal of the cases, said Law Minister Moudud Ahmed yesterday.

The minister's statement came as the Acid Survivors Foundation (ASF) revealed data on 383 acid victims, including 244 women and 25 children, in a string of incidents from January 1 to December 3 this year.

Speaking at a discussion on "Living with Acids" organised by the ASF at BRAC Centre, Moudud said a central monitoring cell of the home and law ministries would be tasked with monitoring the pending cases of acid violence.

The minister underscored collective efforts to build broad consciousness and effective roles of law enforcers as crucial to rolling back the incidence of acid violence.

Some women among the acid survivors attended the discussion and told their stories of how they became victims and struggled to get back to normal life through tribulations.

Rupali Akhter of Manikganj was attacked with acid by her husband and in-laws for Tk 50,000 in dowry, but the attackers are still at large.

Reba Yasmin, another acid survivor, came under attack for ditching a marriage proposition by a young man in a case still to be disposed of by court.

The ASF data show 114 men were among the acid victims in 312 incidents in January 1 to December 3. Abdul Quadir, as the representative of male acid victims, also told his harrowing story of near-death experience and relentless struggle for survival.

Attorney General AF Hassan Ariff, attending the afternoon session of the discussion as chief guest, viewed the legal system as the last instrument to help the victims but said it was not enough.

Torched homes

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The affected families are of Chiradon Sardar, Khitish Sardar, Bikas Sardar, Ramesh Sardar, Nishi Pada Barman, Moniraj Barman, Nal Babu Barman, Khagen Barman, Santosh Barman, Kalipada Barman, Ghagesh Barman, Kalu Barman, Bahgirath Barman, Kishor Sardar, Bhim Sardar, Nakul Sardar and Sahadev Sardar. They were living on a half-acre plot.

Brajen Barman, a local influential person, claimed ownership of the land and was threatening the families for long.

On December 2, a group of 30 hired people swooped on the families, demolished their houses and then set those afire in the presence of police, sources alleged.

"The miscreants came to the spot by three rickshaw vans and took away the corrugated tin roofs of houses and several maunds of aman paddy stored at the houses," said Munmun Bala, a 50-year-old housewife.

The affected families said they filed a case on December 6 but Niamatpur police denied recording the case. None was arrested so far.

Brajen could not be contacted at

Zimbabwe quits

FROM PAGE 12

other Africans. Blair said it was wrong to "muddle" that issue with questions of Zimbabwean democracy and rights violations.

A divided Commonwealth had decided to extend Zimbabwe's suspension, but opened the way for a possible return if Harare engaged in reconciliation with the opposition.

After a contentious debate, host Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said the suspension was maintained to protect the Commonwealth's core pro-democracy principles, but he put a positive face on the decision.

"The process that will lead to the lifting of Zimbabwe's suspension has started," he told a news conference, saying it was probably a matter of months not years.

But Harare had stopped listening.

"President Mugabe indicated... the decision was unacceptable... as the Republic of Zimbabwe would settle for nothing short of its removal from the Commonwealth suspension and agenda," the government said.

"This is unacceptable. This is it - it's quits and quits it will be," the statement quoted Mugabe as saying.

Zimbabwe's main opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) said Mugabe had no right to quit the Commonwealth.

"A social movement is needed to combat such crimes," he said.

Ferdous Ara Begum, joint secretary of women and children affairs, emphasised that a social movement was a must to build anti-acid violence awareness.

Salma Khan, member of the Committee for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, said a social change in attitude towards women is needed to stave off acid throwing.

Advocate UM Habibunnessa, member of Naripakkho, described acid as a potent weapon and put an underscore on a strong role of media.

BSF

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Earlier, the BSF shot dead another Bangladeshi farmer at Shingnagar border under the same upazila on Thursday. The BSF returned his body to local BDR personnel through a flag meeting Sunday evening, the BDR sources added.

Thai Exim Bank

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During the talks, they informed the meeting that the Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is likely to visit Bangladesh in January next.

Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat, Chief Engineer of the Roads and Highways Department Sheikh Rabiul Islam and senior officials took part in discussion.

Rally demands

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not end just by enforcing laws, rather it should engage it with utmost sincerity," added Shahjahan.

Abu Naser Khan, Golem Kibria, Zahidur Rahaman, Asharraf Amir Ullah, Dr. Nur Uddin, Shahidul Islam and others spoke at the rally.

his house.

Officer-in-charge of Niamatpur Police Station Ali Ahmed Hasmi, citing official records of 1962, told reporters that nine acres of land at the place belonged to forefathers of Brajen.

But in 1972, somehow the land was recorded as khas land and Brajen filed a case in 1991 claiming ownership of the land. He appealed to higher court after a lower court verdict in 1998, he added.

On police presence at the spot, the OC said a sub-inspector and a constable in plainclothes were on duty elsewhere. They went to the spot on hearing about the incident and then came to the police station to return there with more forces.