

Arrests, police harassment

FROM PAGE 1
in Paltan Maidan.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a number of police officials in Narayanganj, Narsingdi, Gazipur, Manikganj and Comilla admitted to receiving directives from the home ministry not to allow anyone from their respective districts to travel to the capital without showing appropriate reasons.

"We have also been instructed to restrict transport movement," a top police official of Comilla told The Daily Star preferring anonymity.

Meanwhile, protesting the government's clampdown, leaders of the opposition combine yesterday threatened to launch tougher programmes including indefinite hartal. Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina is expected to announce the programmes from the Paltan Maidan rally tomorrow.

The top command of the opposition combine is also planning to announce a countrywide hartal for up to 72 hours from February 7, protesting the mass arrest of opposition leaders and workers, sources said.

The BNP-Jamaat-led coalition government is trying to smother the long march with police attacks, arrests and torture, alleged AL General Secretary and 14-party coordinator Abdul Jalil last night to The Daily Star.

"But the government cannot stifle people's voice by arrests and oppression," he observed and urged the government to give up 'the path'.

MARCH ON PROGRESS
Nine more processions of the opposition long march started from nine points across the country yesterday to join the five main streams in Comilla, Keraniganj, Savar, Tongi and Narsingdi. All the streams of the long march will enter the capital tomorrow.

The Teknaf procession held a rally at Patia in Chittagong at 3:00pm yesterday and will start the march from Alankar intersection towards Comilla via Sitakunda, Mirersarai and Feni. In Comilla, a rally will be held at around 3:00pm and the procession will leave for Dhaka at 10:00am tomorrow.

Another procession will march via Sirajganj, Tangail, Mirzapur and Kaliakoir and hold a rally at Tongi at 4:00pm today.

An opposition procession started from Sonamasjid in Chapainawabganj yesterday morning and held a rally at Natore. The procession will start from Bonpara in Natore today and gather at Sirajganj to join the long march.

Another segment of the long march from Moulvibazar held a rally at Brahmanbaria. It will march via Bhairab, Raipura and Shibpur and hold a rally at Narsingdi at 4:00pm today.

Another procession marched via Kaliganj, Jhenidah, Magura and Madhukhali and held a rally in Faridpur at 4:00pm. The march will reach Savar today and advance towards Dhaka tomorrow.

The Kushtia procession held a rally at Rajbari and will join the Mongla procession at Goolanda today.

A procession from Haluaghat, Mymensingh, will merge with the Tongi rally today. Three separate processions from three sub-routes started from Susangdurgapur, Sherpur and Jamalpur to join the Tongi rally.

Another procession from Barguna held a rally at Madaripur at 4:00pm and will march to Keraniganj in Dhaka via Shariatpur, Zajira and Mawa.

SITUATION IN DHAKA
The 14-party opposition line-up held rallies and took out processions in different areas in the capital to drum up support for tomorrow's showdown.

Dhaka City unit of 14-party combine held a meeting at the Gono Forum office with city coordinator Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury Maya in the chair. The meeting demanded immediate release of opposition leaders and workers arrested in the city as well as elsewhere in the country.

A special extended meeting of the Awami Jubo League (AJL) was held at its central office on Bangabandhu Avenue chaired by AL Joint General Secretary Abaidul Quader. The meeting condemned the police clampdown to foil the long march.

The police charged baton on an AL procession at the city's Shyampur in the evening injuring at least 50 AL workers and arrested 48 others.

DHAKA CMM COURT
A few hundred relatives of the people detained in the city gathered on the premises of the Court of the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM), Dhaka even in the weekend yesterday, hoping to get their relatives released on bail.

There are no specific cases against many of the arrestees, while some others are now on bail in cases filed earlier against them.

Many detainees were chanting slogans like 'Joy Bangla, Joy Bangabandhu' when a private TV channel was taking shots of them on their way to a court in a police van.

The slogans indicate at least one reason for arresting them.

BOGRA
Our Bogra correspondent reports: AL GS Abdul Jalil at a press briefing

said many political parties have agreed to join hands with the 14-party alliance in its anti-government movement.

The briefing was held at the local circuit house prior to the meeting held in the district yesterday. He, however, did not mention the names of those parties.

Opposition leaders Abdul Mannan, Asaduzzaman Noor, Bimal Biswas, Saleha Sultana, Mamtaz Uddin, Majibur Rahman Majnu and others were present at the briefing.

Meanwhile, the police seized around 150 motorcycles to prevent them from joining the long march, sources said.

MYMENSINGH
Our correspondent in Mymensingh reports: AL Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury at a rally yesterday said the mass arrests and implicating the opposition leaders and workers in false cases will only fuel the ongoing movement.

AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury, AL central leader Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin and other district AL leaders also spoke at the rally.

MOULVIBAZAR
Our Moulvibazar correspondent reports: The 14-party alliance long march from Sylhet division started from Moulvibazar town yesterday noon.

A rally was held at the Central Shaheed Minar in the town before the march started its journey. District AL President Syed Mohsin Ali, Suranjit Sengupta, Sultan Mohammad Monsur Ahmed, Abdur Rahman and Sylhet City Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran addressed the rally.

BARISAL
Our staff correspondent in Barisal reports: The 14-party alliance long march advanced through Barisal division peacefully yesterday. No untoward incident was reported except that the police arrested three BCL activists in Jhalakathi town.

Meanwhile, our correspondents in different districts reported arrest of hundreds of opposition leaders and activists across the country.

NETRAKONA
Around 50 activists of the 14-party opposition combine were injured as police attacked on a long march procession. The law enforcers also arrested 30 activists in different areas of the district.

The long march procession was foiled in the district as the police had earlier requisitioned around 50 buses and arrested around 10 bus-drivers. The police also barricaded the long march procession at different points in the district.

RAJSHAHI REGION
Our staff correspondent reports from Rajshahi reports: Rajshahi police arrested over 100 people in northern region, including 66 in Rajshahi city on Thursday night.

Thousands of people gathered in Natore yesterday as the 14-party long march from Rajshahi region started for Dhaka amid widespread arrest and police requisition of vehicles.

The law enforcers barricaded the Dhaka Road at some points in the morning and later withdrew the roadblocks.

A large rally was held in Natore. Former information minister Prof Abu Sayeed, Workers Party politburo member Fazle Hossain Badsha and others addressed the meeting.

MANIKGANJ
The police arrested 64 opposition workers in different areas of the district on charges of what the law enforcers said "previous complaints".

AL presidium members Tofael Ahmed and Abdur Razzak and Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon led the long march in the district.

The procession of thousands of people held rallies at Barguna, Patuakhali, Bakerganj, Rahamatpur, Bhurghata and Madaripur.

ARRESTS ELSEWHERE
In Chittagong: The highest number of over 100 people were arrested in the port city and 56 in Rangamati yesterday.

In Gaibandha: The police arrested at least 22 leaders and activists of AL and its front organisations in seven upazilas of the district on Thursday night. They also set up check posts to prevent vehicles carrying long marchers, alleged a district AL leader.

In Magura: The police arrested 21 persons, including activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jubo League, in four upazilas on Thursday night. With these arrests, the total number of arrestees in the district rose to 66 in the last couple of days.

In Khagrachhari: At least 40 persons were arrested in seven upazilas of the district although there are no notable workers and leaders of AL among the arrestees. The police have shown them arrested under section 54 of the CrPC to avoid the issue of long march, sources said.

In Noakhali: A total of 47 leaders and workers of the 14-party opposition combine were arrested in different upazilas of the district.

In Pabna: Jatiyatabad Chhatra Dal (JCD), the student wing of the ruling BNP, attacked an opposition procession at Sujanagar Zero Point, leaving at least 10 injured. The JCD men also abducted an AL activist

during the attack.

In Kushtia: The police in separate raids arrested 133 activists of the 14-party combine in Jhenidah and Chuadanga districts on Thursday night.

In Syedpur: The police arrested eight opposition workers and damaged the 14-party podium in the town.

In Jamalpur: At least 15 opposition workers were injured during clash while a joint procession of local BNP, Juba Dal and JCD men attacked the pro-opposition procession Bakshiganj Bus stand. Police fired two rubber bullet shots and arrested three AL supporters.

In Cox's Bazar: The police arrested at least 85 opposition workers from different upazilas of the district until yesterday evening.

In Comilla: At least 20 opposition supporters were arrested from different upazilas until 9:00pm last night.

In Laxmipur: The police arrested at least 20 opposition workers in the district.

In Gazipur: The police raided opposition workers' houses under all the upazila and arrested at least 50 opposition workers.

Besides, the police arrested two BCL leaders in Sarail of Brahmanbaria, 10 in Mirzapur of Tangail, 24 in Munshiganj, six in Khoksha of Kushtia, 27 in Feni, 13 in Joypurhat, 23 in Faridpur, five in Chandpur, nine in Barguna and 60 others in Narayanganj.

UNB adds: AL activists and its front organisations yesterday barricaded the Dhaka-Sherpur Highway for half an hour, protesting hindrance by the local administration ahead of the long march towards Dhaka.

The barricade was withdrawn following a meeting between the AL leaders, police, administration officials and leaders of bus owners. Local AL leaders alleged that the police and administration officials put pressure on the bus owners not to provide their vehicles for the long march.

India says latest nuclear missile ready for launch

AFP, New Delhi

India yesterday announced it had completed all tests and was ready to deploy its latest nuclear-tipped missile, capable of striking targets at a distance of 3,000 kilometres (1,860 miles).

"All technical parameters for the launch of the missile have been completed," M. Natarajan announced at a news conference in New Delhi.

"We are ready for the launch today... it is now for political leadership to give the nod," Natarajan said of the Indian-built missile code-named Agni-III (Fire).

Agni-III is the longest range missile of its type and can carry a one-tonne conventional or nuclear warhead.

Delhi in 1993 began testing basic variants of the Agni, but shelved the experiments for two years ostensibly under US pressure. The flight-tests resumed after India conducted a series of nuclear weapons tests in 1998.

Natarajan, who heads the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) comprising dozens of state-owned industries and military research facilities, said scientists were also trying to develop a 1,000-kilometre range cruise missile.

The chief scientist also announced that a naval variant of the 300-kilometre range BrahMos cruise missile, which has been jointly developed by India and Russia, was ready for deployment.

"The ship-launched missile is ready for deployment and is currently going through trial with navy and army," Natarajan said, but declined to confirm reports the DRDO was also working on a submarine-fired BrahMos.

The official said the DRDO had made "tremendous progress" on an anti-missile shield for which India is currently negotiating with the United States, Russia and Israel.

India in 1983 launched its integrated guided missile development programme and so far has built an array of systems including the battlefield missile Prithvi (Earth) which can carry a 500-kilogram nuclear warhead and other tactical missiles.

Natarajan said that India was plagued by growing shortages of military scientists.

"As against the need for a minimum of 100,000 design engineers, we are making do with just 6,000 of them in the DRDO and this will come in the way of development of future missile and space weapons," he said.

Rayerbazar fire

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mane situation living on the roadsides of the affected area.

"Finding no shelter we are now compelled to sleep on burnt tin-sheets," said Ripona Begum, 30, a mother of five small children.

Crises of food have added to the suffering. "The community centre distributed 20 kilograms of rice to each of the families, but we have no access to a kitchen," said Champa, an old woman affected by the fire.

Egyptian ferry

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the HMS Bulwark warship in the Red Sea to offer help but the vessel would reportedly take one and a half days to reach the scene.

The Egyptian ship, called Al-Salam 98, had departed from the Saudi port of Duba and had been due to reach Safaga at 2:30 am local time (0030 GMT) after a crossing of up to 18 hours.

The boat was also reported to be carrying more than 40 vehicles.

The Panamanian-flagged ship is 118 metres long (387 feet) and around 24 metres wide (78 feet).

Close to 500 people had perished when another Salam Express ferry boat sunk in the Red Sea in 1991 in the deadliest shipping accident in the Middle East in recent years. A probe found it was caused by a navigation error on the part of the captain.

Andrea Odone, from the operations department of the Al-Salam Maritime Transport company's Cairo headquarters told AFP that the ship complied with all safety rules.

"The ship is registered in Panama. It met all the safety requirements, and it fully complies with international safety rules... The number of passengers on board was less than the maximum number," he said.

"We have diverted three of our vessels to go on the spot. One of them will be at there 3:30 pm (1330 GMT)," said Odone, who was unable to give any figures on the number of people feared dead.

Red Sea Governor Bakr al-Rashidi announced that an operations room had been set up in Safaga and a state of emergency was declared in the area's hospitals.

According to French-based shipping expert Yvan Perchoc, the Al-Salam Baccacio 98 is one of several old Italian ferries to which extra levels were added in order to boost passenger capacity, sometimes threefold.

"Among the ships operating crossings in the Red Sea... some are remarkable because of the height of their structures. They are old Italian ferries to which four extra decks have been added, raising the capacity from 500 to around 1,400," he told AFP.

"Despite the addition of extra bulges on the sides of these ships, one can wonder about their stability," he said, adding that the draft of such ships was generally very low.

A ship owned by the same Al-Salam company collided with a

cargo ship near the entrance of the Suez canal in October, causing a stampede that left two dead and up to 100 wounded.

An inquiry into the accident blamed the captain for violating the rules governing transit through the Suez canal.

The popular Red Sea holiday area was already hit by tragedy on January 31 when a bus carrying HongKong tourists overturned between Hurghada and Safaga, leaving 14 dead and 30 wounded.

Foes in politics

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On information, police reached the spot and arrested the two.

Saiful and Liton are often seen chasing each other during their parties' political programmes at day, said locals and police.

Soon after their arrest, telephone calls started pouring in Jaldhaka Police Station, requesting the Officer-in-Charge Abdul Mannan to set them free. Jaldhaka Police, however, refused to submit to any pressure and took the two young men to hospital for test and 'stomach wash'.

On Thursday noon police produced them before the court for legal proceeding. This incident has become a talk of the town in Jaldhaka.

Forex

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rencies several times from inside toilets of aircrafts but the Biman authorities did not take any measure in this regard.

Chairman of National Board of Revenue Khairuzzaman Chowdhury visited Zia following the recovery and discussed the matter with the managing director of Biman.

Customs officials had seized Saudi Riyals worth about Tk 64 lakh from a Dubai-bound passenger of Biman at ZIA on July 17 last year and Euros, Hong Kong and US dollars, and Chinese and Bangladeshi currencies worth about Tk 27.57 lakh were seized from a Hong Kong bound passenger at the same airport on March 18 last year. Two passengers were arrested in connection with the two incidents.

While visiting the airport yesterday NBR chairman told reporters that customs officials had filed several cases in connection with such recoveries, which are not yet settled.

Diesel price hikes

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The government's budgetary allocation of Tk 1,200 crore in subsidy for farm sector this fiscal year (2005-06) now appears far short of the requirement to cover the fertiliser price gap. The demand for urea this year is projected at 28 lakh tonnes while the country produced 19 lakh tonnes. For each tonne of locally produced urea, the government has to provide Tk 1,200 in subsidy to bridge the gap between production cost (Tk 6,000) and sale price (Tk 4,800).

Moreover, the government has to bear a subsidy of Tk 13,200 per tonne of imported urea as import cost is Tk 18,000 a tonne.

Bangladeshi farmers usually spend \$53 to irrigate one hectare of farmland compared to \$18 in Thailand and Vietnam, \$19 and \$31 in West Bengal and Punjab states of India, according to the Agriculture Sector Review (ASR) conducted recently by the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for Bangladesh's agriculture ministry.

Meanwhile, the government has granted a power tariff rebate for about 10 percent of the farming community, who use electricity-run irrigation pumps. But it is yet to meet the subsidy needs of about 90 percent farmers who use diesel-run shallow pumps to irrigate cropland.

There are around one million diesel-run pumps as against hardly one lakh electricity-run ones in the country. Erratic power supply also causes troubles for farmers using electricity-run pumps.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar told The Daily Star that the cost of operating diesel-run pumps is 30 per cent higher compared to electricity-run ones.

His ministry had repeatedly put forward a proposal for subsidy on diesel amounting to Tk 381 crore to give the poor and marginal peasants somewhat relief from the rapidly increasing input costs and create a level playing field for farmers using power-run pumps and diesel-run pumps. But the finance ministry time and again turned down the proposal, saying the subsidy would be misused as diesel-run pumps are also used for operating mechanised boats.

The FAO-prepared ASR however strongly recommended subsidy to owners of diesel-run pumps at the rate of 20 percent of the cost of diesel, certified by the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) and also by local government bodies or irrigation groups.

"For increased coverage and relatively trouble free operations, all the irrigation pumps should be electrified on a priority basis, say, within a fixed time frame of 10 years with adequate insurance for uninterrupted supply. This is expected to reduce both fixed and operating cost by about 50 percent," the ASR says.

Sources at the agriculture ministry and the DAE pointed out that there is no policy directives as yet to convert all diesel-run pumps into power-run ones to reduce cost of farm production.

Hasina

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were staged "on government's instructions and switch of the bombs is in the hands of the government".

Earlier in the day, in her brief address to the local Awami League leaders and workers, Hasina accused the alliance government of creating instability in the country through its "misrule and support to militancy".

The AL chief urged all to vote for the Awami League candidates in the next elections to protect the country from the "anti-liberation axis of BNP and Jamaat".

Hasina reached Tungipara Thursday evening from Dhaka to offer fateha at the mazar of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

She attended a milad mahfil at Bangabandhu Memorial Complex after Juma prayers yesterday. Awami League leaders, including Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP, Farook Khan MP, Jahangir Kabir Nanak, Muhammad Ali Khan Abu Miah and Emdad Chowdhury, were present.

Hasina left Tungipara for Dhaka at 4:30pm.

Bomb blast

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their hands, legs and heads.

Babul was sent to Dhaka in a critical condition, while his son Robin was admitted to a local hospital.

Immediately after the incident, police arrested four suspects. Police and Rab members are patrolling the area.

15th anniversary

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home and abroad are expected to join the members of The Daily Star family in today's celebration seen as a milestone in the advancement of English-language journalism in the country with a firm commitment to upholding people's right to know.

The celebration will commence with inauguration of a photo exhibition in the evening while the microcredit guru Prof Muhammad Yunus is scheduled to present the key speech. Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, and the Chair of the Mediaword, the Rokia company of the paper, Rokia A Rahman, will deliver the welcome address and make closing remarks.

The 15th anniversary celebration programme also includes a reception, classical dance, folk songs and a laser show.

On the occasion of the anniversary, The Daily Star is also bringing out 312 pages of supplements in six instalments on different dates starting from today.

Topics of the six supplements are, Celebrating Bangladesh published today, Trends to be published on February 7, Our Cities to be published on February 10, Sports to be published on February 13, Investment to be published on February 16, and Bangladesh and the World to be published on February 19.

Navigability

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upstream in the rainy season flood the country, causing sufferings to millions every year.

A top official of the BIWTA said negligence of the successive governments in restoring navigability has been reflected in budgetary allocations since the independence.

"We have failed to realise that maintaining waterways means prosperity of the country and saving of crores of taka in transportation costs," said a top engineer of the WDB requesting anonymity.

Experts noted the demand for water has risen manifold with the rise of population, and without a proper plan for floodwater management, it would not be possible to protect the natural waterways.

Govt running

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foot-dragging in implementing the court order must be brought to book. Instead of acting against some small-time bureaucrats, the court should go after the top guns in the government who called the shots, he added.

Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud said the government is violating the SC order by not complying with it, though there is no stay order on it and as the government's prayer for time has been rejected twice by the SC in the last four months.

He termed the recent request for time extension farcical, as the court had already rejected the prayer on October 20.

To his view, the government's steps are aimed at degrading the court and avoiding the judiciary separation. The Appellate Division should be resolute against these moves, he said, adding if it does not take a strong stance in this case, the SC will be demeaned.

Rokanuddin also expressed doubt about the legality and validity of all the verdicts passed by the lower courts in the last four months, as there has not been any stay order on the SC directive for making the judiciary separate.

He warned the government of grim consequences if the directive remains unrealised any further.

RU teacher murdered

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indefinite strike with effect from today.

Taher used to visit Dhaka at regular intervals since shifting his family there seven months ago for the education of his daughter. He went missing shortly after returning to Rajshahi Wednesday.

Late in the evening, he phoned his wife Sultana Ahmed in Dhaka to let her know that he had reached campus safely. Later at around 8:00pm, he called his daughter Sunita and said he was going to have dinner within minutes, family sources said.

Since then he could not be reached despite repeated attempts, said his son Himel, an official of British American Tobacco Ltd.

Taher's wife informed Prof Sultan-ul Islam that her husband was missing. The other teachers and employees led by RU Registrar Abdus Salam then started to scour the campus for him.

Dr Sultanul Islam of the geology department said Taher returned to Rajshahi to attend a planning committee meeting of the department scheduled for Thursday.

A source said he was among two expert-level members of the committee assigned to select teachers for promotion or recruitment.

Meanwhile, police said primary investigations suggest that Prof Taher might have been killed in the room of his guard Jahangir.

Police recovered a bloodstained pillow, carpet and bedcover from the room on the ground floor of the two-storey house, said a police official.

He was bleeding from his mouth and nose when police recovered the body at 7:30am.

Jahangir, who was arrested yesterday, denied his involvement. He told police that Taher was home when he left the house Wednesday evening. But he did not find him when he returned at 10:00pm.

An assistant commissioner of Detective Branch of police in Rajshahi said Jahangir's version did not sound credible.

"He seems very likely to know the killers," he observed.

The killers locked every room and the main gate before leaving the house. "They dumped the body inside a sewer probably to keep the murder hidden at least for some days," said Faizur Rahman, officer in charge of Motihar Police Station.

Besides Jahangir, two other guards—Alfaz and Zahur—were arrested and being interrogated.

PROFILE
Dr Taher was born in Kolkata in December 1945. After majoring in geology at Dhaka University in 1960, he joined geography department of RU in 1973.