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Dawn-to-dusk hartal today

50 injured in pre-hartal clash in Rajshahi

STAR REPORT

The Awami League (AL)-led 14-party opposition alliance enforces countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal today demanding uninterrupted power supply and reduction of the prices of fertiliser and fuel.

At least 50 people were injured as a pro-hartal procession went unruly following BNP men's bomb attack on them and police charged baton on the clashing groups at Shaheb Bazar in Rajshahi yesterday evening.

The 6:00am to 6:00pm hartal will also coincide with the day of controversial sixth parliamentary elections in 1996 that was held amid boycott by major political parties except the then ruling BNP.

It is part of 14-party alliance's month-long agitation programmes that Leader of the Opposition and AL chief Sheikh Hasina announced on February 5.

However, Satkhira district and Barisal city will not come under the

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Govt now says fuel price not hiked

No gazette issued on such increase, Bhuiyan tells JS; AL walks out terming his statement false

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government in parliament yesterday denied hiking the prices of diesel, petrol and octane in the northern districts while the main opposition Awami League (AL) termed the statement false and walked out in protest at the price hike.

In response to the AL lawmakers' protest, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan told the House that the fuel prices have not been increased.

"The government has not published any gazette notifying people of any decision to increase the price of diesel. We will consult with the prime minister about the mat-

ter on her return from Pakistan tonight [Tuesday]. And hopefully there'll be no rise in diesel price," the LGRD minister said amid protest by the AL lawmakers.

Besides, he claimed, at present there is no crisis of fertiliser, fuel or power in the country.

Soon after the minister's statement, Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina along with her deputies led a walkout of the House. Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui was presiding over the sitting at that time. He described the walkout as unfortunate.

The opposition lawmakers did not return to parliament yesterday. "The minister gave a false state-

ment in the House. The government is playing hide-and-seek with the fuel price," Hasina told reporters in an impromptu press briefing after the walkout.

"The energy adviser stated clearly that the government has decided to increase the prices of diesel, petrol and octane by Tk 1 a litre in the northern districts, but Mannan Bhuiyan denied taking any such decision," she said.

Hasina, also president of AL, asked the government to come clean about the issue.

The government on Monday hiked prices of diesel, petrol and octane by Tk 1 a litre in the fuel-hungry northern region to

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Export, import thru' Hili port resume today after 17 days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

The import and export operations at Hili land port in Dinajpur resume today following the Indian traders' and truckers' decision to withdraw the new transport rules and the strike they enforced from February 4.

The operations of Hili land port have been stopped for the last 17 days following strike and counter strike imposed by the Indian and Bangladeshi traders.

At least 10 meetings were held between the clearing and forwarding (C&F) agents, traders, truckers and the district magistrate of Balurghat of India, after which the Indian traders and truckers agreed to withdraw the rules. They agreed

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Prime Minister Khaleda Zia talks with Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in Islamabad yesterday before wrapping up her three-day state visit to Pakistan.

Musharraf, Khaleda talk cooperation

UNB, Islamabad

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf yesterday emphasised enhanced bilateral cooperation in all areas, including political, socio-economic, diplomatic, investment, trade and commerce and education, for the benefit of the two peoples.

The view was expressed when Prime Minister Khaleda Zia had a meeting with the Pak president at Aiwan-e-Sadar (president's house)

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PM for strategic business partnership with Pakistan

Asks businesses to increase bilateral trade to \$1b by next year

UNB, Islamabad

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday sought strategic business partnership with Pakistani entrepreneurs in potential sectors, including textiles, and to help increase bilateral trade to \$1 billion by the next year.

"Despite our fraternal relations,

our two countries are yet to tap the full potential of economic cooperation... We agree on the need for further increase in trade and investment. Only thing we need to do now is to swing into action on the basis of a realistic plan," she said at a reception hosted by the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce

and Industry (FPCCI) at Hotel Serena.

FPCCI President Chaudhury Muhammad Saeed and FBCCI President Mir Nasir Hossain also spoke on the occasion.

A memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the FPCCI and

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HC INJUNCTION Judge Chunnu appeals to SC for stay order

Hearing tomorrow

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Divisional Special Judge Rezaul Karim Khan Chunnu yesterday appealed to the Supreme Court seeking stay on Monday's High Court order that imposed injunction on his discharging judicial functions for two weeks.

Chunnu filed the application to Chamber Judge of the Appellate Division Justice Amrul Kabir Chowdhury who referred the application to the regular bench of the Appellate Division for hearing tomorrow.

Chunnu, who faces the injunction for his alleged involvement in BNP's political activities despite being a sitting judge, went to the Supreme Court but was waiting outside the chamber judge's court while the matter was being heard.

A High Court division bench passed the injunction on Monday after Supreme Court lawyer Khairul Alam filed a writ petition alleging Chunnu's involvement in politics.

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Cops turn a blind eye

Narcotics control dept laments tight budget, lack of manpower

PINAKI ROY

'Brother, where can I get Phensedyl,' asked this correspondent to a group of policemen sitting near Gopibagh Railway Colony. One of them pointed his finger to a narrow lane and said, "Go along

that lane, you will find the spot." The unusual cooperation from a police confirmed the allegation that drug dealing is going on unhindered in the capital as well as other urban areas in the country thanks to a nexus between drug barons and law enforcement agen-

cies. Drug dealers say they run the trade by managing all the law enforcement agencies concerned. "Every one gets a piece of the pie. People from all the agencies come to us to collect their weekly cuts,"

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Several drug spots are in operation at Titipara slum even in presence of policemen.

One killed in 'crossfire' in 3-hr gunfight

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

An alleged robber was killed in 'crossfire' during a three-hour gunfight between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his accomplices on Monday night at a village in Banshkhal upazila of the district.

The elite anticrime force arrested 14 people and recovered six firearms and 13 cartridges from the spot.

The dead was identified as Md Zamir Uddin, 35, of village Sharal under Sharal union of the upazila, said a Rab press release yesterday.

A Rab squad from Chittagong raided the village at around 7:30pm on information that some robbers gathered near Kala Miah's house to commit robbery at a salt enclosure.

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PUBLIC FINANCE MANAGEMENT Donors pin good governance to aid

Irked by their dictation, Saifur says they treat him like clerk

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The donors yesterday asked Bangladesh to prepare performance indicators of public finance management (PFM), as its chance of getting future aid would depend on 'such governance-related benchmarks'.

In response to the donors' directives, Finance Minister Saifur

Rahman said, "It's not possible to reform overnight. I believe in reform, but we'll also have to consider the socio-political conditions."

Speaking as the chief guest at a workshop on 'Action Plan for Public Finance Management' jointly sponsored by the World Bank (WB) and the government, Saifur said, "Your agenda will have

to be harmonised with our agenda."

Criticising a tendency of the donor agencies, especially the WB and the IMF, to dictate every trifle detail, the finance minister said the donors treat him as if he were a clerk.

"We'll have to have our ownership of a programme. This is also

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SAARC SYMPOSIUM Central bank top shots sit in city today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Saarc Finance Governors' Symposium on microcredit starts today at Hotel Sheraton in Dhaka.

Saarc Finance, platform for the central bank governors of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) countries, has taken the initiative to organise the symposium.

Bangladesh Bank's Governor Salehuddin Ahmed, also the chairman of Saarc Finance, told reporters yesterday that the symposium will address issues like Saarc development fund and Saarc poverty reduction fund along with microcredit.

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COMMODITY PRICE HIKE Devaluation of taka to worsen situation

MONJUR MAHMUD

As the country depends heavily on import to meet the growing demand for many an essential commodity, the current spate of devaluation of taka will push their already exorbitant prices further up in the coming days, apprehend commerce ministry officials and traders.

Over the last one month, the local currency has lost its value by nearly 3 percent against US dollar. The price of dollar in opening letters of credit (LCs) yesterday hit a record Tk 70, which was Tk 68.15 one month ago.

"As the importers have been paying more and facing serious troubles in opening LCs in the recent days, it may have a negative

impact on prices of essential commodities in the days to come," a highly-placed source at the commerce ministry said yesterday.

It may not be possible to keep the prices stable without some fiscal measures, he noted, adding the dependency on import to meet the demand of essential commodities is also rising day by day.

Bangladesh depends mostly on import to meet the domestic demands for some essential commodities including sugar, pulses, edible oil, flour, condensed and powdered milk, garlic, onion, ginger, dry chilli and turmeric.

According to sources, the annual domestic demand for sugar is around 12 lakh metric ton (MT), while the mills under the

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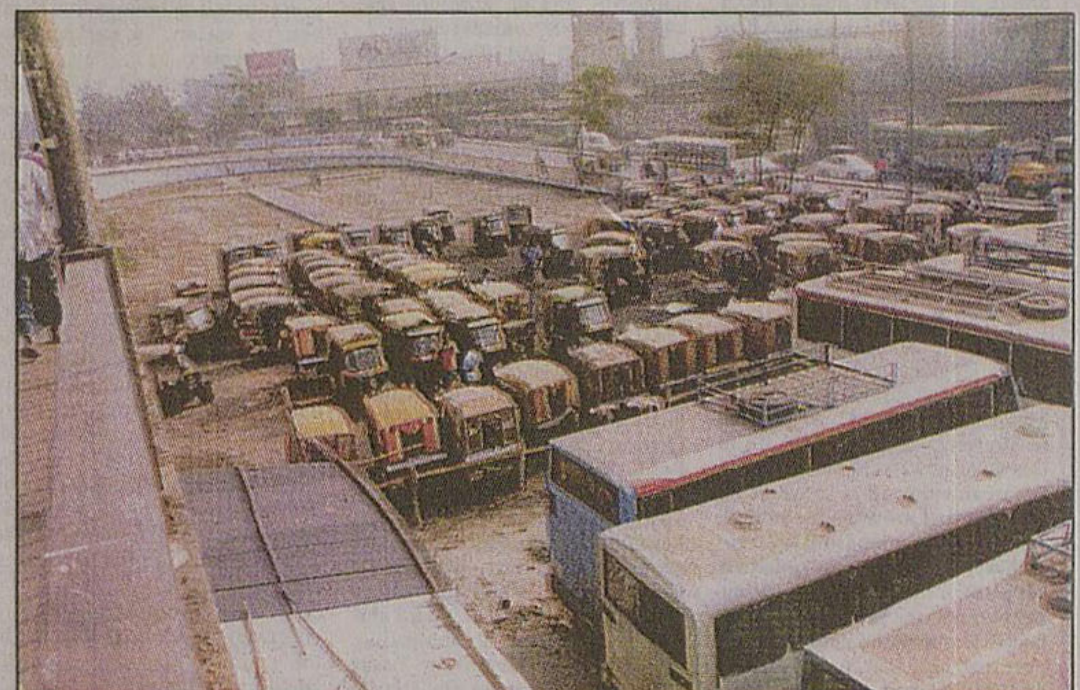


PHOTO: STAR

The park in the city's Postogola beneath the Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge has now turned into a bus and three-wheeler depot in part, with illegal structures occupying another large segment.

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