

Fertiliser, diesel

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Tala Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Mostafizur Rahman for about an hour on the road. Demanding fertilisers, they assaulted the DC as the two attempted to remove the barricade.

Besides, at least 20 farmers staged fast-until-death in front of the Patkelghata Police Station, demanding immediate supply of fertilisers.

Police said the farmers came to Patkelghata Bazar in the morning to buy fertilisers, but as urea was scarce and pricey, the angry farmers staged sit-in on the highway.

Meanwhile, over 2,000 farmers put up barricade on the Satkhira-Kaigjanj Road in Satkhira Sadar upazila from 7:00am to 11:00am yesterday, demanding fertilisers.

The angry farmers chanted slogans against Jamaat lawmaker Maulana Abdul Khaled for not taking any measure to solve the fertiliser crisis.

Sadar UNO SM Ashrafuzzaman and the police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control, assuring the farmers of fertiliser supply within 2:00pm today.

In Jessore, agitating farmers demanding fertiliser brought out processions and hurled shoes at the office of the Keshabpur UNO yesterday morning. They also laid siege to the Upazila Krishi Office, reports our correspondent in Jessore.

DC Mohammad Abdul Wazed and Additional Deputy Commissioner (General) Omar Farook rushed to Keshabpur at noon and distributed 245 bags urea. Hundreds of farmers, however, had to return empty-handed.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports: Hundreds of farmers laid siege to the offices of the DC and the Deputy Director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE), protesting adulteration and crises of agricultural inputs including diesel, fertiliser, seeds and power in the district.

DC Nazrul Islam Khan and DAE Deputy Director Ainul Haque, however, had left their offices sensing the farmers' programme.

The angry farmers damaged a vehicle of an agro-input marketing company in front of the Zila Parishad Community Centre Market.

The farmers under Rangpur Krishi Unnayan Forum, Rangpur Potato Farmers Council and Rangpur Farmers Council brought out a procession in the morning and paraded the main roads of the town.

In Cox's Bazar also, different political parties and farmers' organisations look to the streets and besieged the Ukhya UNO office, demanding fertiliser and diesel, reports our correspondent in the district.

The Awami League (AL) and the Communist Party of Bangladesh brought out processions, held rallies and laid siege to the UNO office.

The AL activists scuffled with the police as the law enforcers obstructed their programme.

The manager of Fayeze Filling Station in the town said he got enough diesel for sale although the diesel crisis and short supply of urea have deepened the farmers' woes.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: Fuel stock of Balashi floating depot was exhausted within three days of receiving nearly 5 lakh litre diesel. There is widespread allegation that six distributors in the remote shoal areas hoarded 51,200 litre diesel after receiving fuel from the depot.

Sources said oil barge MV Tapash arrived at the Balashi floating depot with 495,000 litre diesel on February 18. The depot distributed 400,000

litre diesel among 24 dealers and distributors the same day.

Locals alleged that around six distributors of the shoal areas hoarded more than 50,000 litre fuel for additional profit. They also alleged that although these distributors had papers for specific sale centres, they did not follow it.

These distributors either sold the total stock on the black market or to people at high price, sources said.

Amimul Huq, local union parishad member and owner of Bhai Bhai Enterprise that received 8,800 litre diesel from the depot, however, denied the allegations of selling fuel at Tk 36 per litre. "We are selling diesel at Tk 33 per litre and are compelled to do so to compensate for the high cost of transportation and labour," he said.

Eighteen more oil dealers in the remote shoal areas have meanwhile received 398,000 litre diesel at the instruction of the monitoring cell concerned, said Motiur Rahman, in-charge of Balashi floating depot.

US eager to help

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in Bangladesh and thinking of how to assist it in this regard.

Briefing newsmen about the meeting with Crowley that lasted for about an hour Abdul Jalil said they informed the US congressman about 14-party's proposal for reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission that has been placed at the Jatijya Sangsad.

"Our leader said without necessary reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission it is not possible to hold a free and fair election," Jalil told the journalists.

Hasina had provided Crowley with an elaborate picture of the current political and social situation in the country including downslide of law and order, human rights violations with impunity, torture on opposition activists, corruption, and terrorism.

"We told him that our aim in placing the proposals for electoral reforms is to hold a fair election to ensure peoples right to vote and to institutionalise democracy in the country," Abdul Jalil MP said.

He said the US congressman, who is on a three-day visit to Bangladesh, expressed concerns over rising religious militancy in the country, which is destroying the values of the Liberation War.

"We said corruption is another serious issue that is tarnishing the image and hindering the development process of the country. A large portion of resources of the country are in the hands of only a few people," Jalil informed the journalists.

Jalil claimed that Crowley appreciated the AL for establishing good governance during its regime.

Hasina during her meeting with Crowley also sought help from him in achieving duty-free access for Bangladesh garment products to the US market. "He said he would think how to help Bangladesh to get a duty-free access," Jalil said.

AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sen Gupta MP, Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, former diplomat Faruk Chowdhury and US Charge d'Affaires in Bangladesh Judith Chammas were also present at the meeting.

Tk 94cr money suit filed against Inqilab Enterprise

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The local office of Sonali Bank in Motijheel commercial area yesterday filed three money suits against three industries of Inqilab Enterprise and Publications Ltd for realisation of Tk 94 crore default loans.

The suits were filed with the First Arthan Adalat, Dhaka making defendants AMM Bahauddin, executive director of M/S kaderia Publications and Products Ltd, Hosne Ara Begum, chairman of M/S Arshia Apparels Ltd and eight others of the three industries.

Following the hearing, Judge Mohammad Rafiqul Islam issued summons upon the defendants to appear before it on March 6.

In the plaints of the three suits, the plaintiffs of the bank mentioned that the industries took Tk 94 crore as loan from the local office of the bank in Motijheel commercial area mortgaging their properties against the amount of money. The industries took the loan from 1990 to 1998.

As the industries failed even though the bank repeatedly insisted that they pay the money, the bank filed the suits for realisation of the money by selling their mortgaged properties, the plaintiffs added.

Barrister Abdullah Al Mamun and advocate Golam Sarwar Moin moved the suits on behalf of the bank.

Over 35 thousand Bangladeshis missing in India

Lok Sabha told

UNB, New Delhi

Indian Minister of State for Home Sriprakash Jaiswal on Tuesday informed the Lower House (Lok Sabha) of Parliament that 35,718 Bangladeshis nationals were missing in India following the expiry of their visas.

He said some 62,998 foreign nationals including Bangladeshis were absconding.

"Such foreigners were found to be overstaying after expiry of their visas as on December 31, 2004," the minister added.

He said the state government has been delegated powers to detect and deport foreign nationals staying in India illegally. Besides instructions were also issued to the state government authorities to launch special drive to detect and deport foreigners staying illegally.

Jaiswal also informed the House 12,592 Afghans and 8,287 Pakistanis were also absconding in the country. Nationals from Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Pakistan form the bulk of foreigners overstaying in the country.

There are also nationals from over 100 countries, who after expiry of visas continued to stay in the country illegally. In fact, 716 American and 39 British citizens are also reported to be absconding.

Tigers

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composure with Bangladesh comfortably placed at 154 for three by the end of the 37th over. Both Bashar and Ashrafu were caught at dead mid-in in the space of four deliveries and Bangladesh suddenly slumped to 155-5.

But little Aftab and Alok Kapali brought back cheers in a full house crowd with an absorbing stand of 51 runs for the sixth wicket to effectively seal the match. The game looked evenly poised when Bangladesh needed 46 runs off 46 balls. But after Aftab hit a six over long on and a four in the 45th over bowled by Dilhara Fernando that produced 16 runs, victory was just a matter of time.

Aftab's 22-ball cameo contained two fours and a six. The 21-year-old Aftab, who was later adjudged man-of-the-match, levelled the score hitting the last ball of the 46th over for four.

But the Chittagong right-hander, who hit the winning runs against Australia in June last year, was standing at the non-striker's end when wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud guided the ball to third man for the winning run.

Bangladesh had earlier bowled Sri Lanka out for 212 in exactly 49 overs after a delayed start due to fog forced the match to be reduced by one over.

Opener Sanath Jayasuriya struck a superb 96 but failed to get support from other batsmen.

But it was the Bangladesh bowlers who deserve kudos for containing the free-scoring Sri Lankans after Bashar won a good toss and decided to field on a damp wicket.

Left-arm paceman Syed Raseel struck the first two blows before Kapali and Mohammad Rafique ripped through the middle-order with a couple of scalps each. Premier Bangladesh paceman Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza also bowled his heart out, but he was unlucky to get a wicket.

The match also had its share of controversy when Bangladesh umpire Mahabubur Rahman declared Sri Lanka opener Jehan Mubarak caught behind by Mashud off Raseel in his second over. TV replays showed that Mashud took the ball off the bounce and Jayasuriya standing at the other end failed to persuade Mahub to call for a verdict of the third umpire.

Jayasuriya made a slow start scoring just eight runs off the first 26 deliveries but reached his 60th half-century off 61 deliveries. He hit eight fours and a six.

Sri Lanka, who were at one stage reeling on 168-7, could only cross the 200-mark thanks to a productive last over of Nazmul that yielded 19 runs.

Divided lessons, falling quality

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fish" several times, then she gives up.

"I can't read," she admits quietly and fumbles with the corner of her torn yellow frock. On this remote char, her parents could not afford her any warm clothes even in the December chill. Her hairs have not received any care for god knows how many years.

A class-VI student is tried next. Touting a wristwatch with a silvery strap, Mafidul comes from a different school -- Narayanpur High School -- a few villages away. He looks equally baffled by the writings on the board but could read the 'am' in the sentence "I am a student". Then he gives up, too.

These children have no faults of their own. They have a school housed in a two-storey building. It in fact is the loudest thing to exist on the Char, a yellow structure built by the government. Its iron windows and doors look solid. The playground is quite big. Tables and benches are there, though they remain overturned most of the time. Defying these facilities, what stands in stark contrast is that the students hardly see their teachers.

"He came here today after a month," Lokman Ali, an elderly man sporting wild beards, tries to recall. "But he has gone to see some of his friends." It was 11 in the morning, an unlikely hour for a teacher to take a personal break. But that is what it is in the remote chars.

The villagers counted with their poor arithmetic and came to the conclusion that the school was open for two months last year. What can they do if the teacher does not come?

But hardly can anyone blame the teacher. He lives at least 15 kilometres off at a place called Kathbari. If anyone thinks he would come every day from there, crossing the Brahmaputra spending a few hundred takas, he must be bereft of his senses.

But char or no char, it makes little difference for many. A few hundred miles from the char, at Purba Tripripara Girls High School in Ishwardi, VII, VIII and IX grade students are tried about their education.

Sumaiya Sultana Mini, a seventh grader, cannot translate "I get up early in the morning" from Bangla.

Her classmate Arjina Khatun cannot say what is photosynthesis. A ninth grader, Tuli Khatun, does not know what happened in 1757 in the history of Bengal.

At Madhyakumarpur Primary Girls School in Kurigram, Sheuli, a class-VI student, does not know the words -- rice, fish, goat or chicken.

Nice statistics, generating a little sense of complacency. But a little afield, and the downside begins. Only 2 percent of the children who complete primary education can muster all the government-set capabilities. Two-thirds of the children completing primary education remain basically illiterate or semi-

She knows the word cow.

The same picture emerged from at least six schools spreading from Ishwardi to Kurigram. The pictures all tell one single story -- the sharp quality divide in education not only exists between the cities and semi-rural and rural areas but also between the rich and the poor in Bangladesh.

"The divide is sharper in the poorest areas," says Rasheda K Chowdhury, director of the Campaign for Popular Education, Bangladesh (Campe). "The schools in the poor rural areas don't have adequate teaching staffs; even if they have teachers, they are often absent or hire out their jobs to somebody else. The situation is leading to a widening of the education gap between the rich and the poor."

"We spend 25 to 30 dollars a year for each primary student. But 90 percent of the amount goes to pay the teachers' salary," Rasheda points out. "And less than 10 percent is spent on teachers' training."

The books and the teaching methods are uninteresting, making education a tedious task for the children. The NGO-run schools are better in these respects. But they cover only 8 percent of the children. Seventy percent are left to government schools and the rest to private ones.

"Of the 70 percent children enrolled in the government schools, only 10 percent -- those who attend the cadet colleges -- get better education," says Rasheda. "This means the mainstream of the population is being badly educated and they won't be at the helm of the public affairs at the later stage. If education remains confined to the elite, this will have negative impacts on the country's development."

These observations clash with the other side of the education scenario. For example, more and more children are going to schools today -- 80 percent of those between six and eight years take admission in schools. Fewer children are dropping out of schools and more are completing the primary education cycle. Three-fourths of those who attend schools actually complete their education. The gender parity in education has even a rosier picture. Boys and girls are going to schools in equal numbers.

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literate. Like the children of Bhagabatipur Char, they remain uneducated even after five years of schooling. Even this year, 2 million children will remain out of the primary schooling.

There are too many students than teachers. There is only one teacher for every 72 students in the government schools and the corresponding figure for private schools is 55 students. If the primary education has to stand on a firm footing, then the numbers of schools, classrooms and teachers have to be doubled. Even then, monitoring of the schools will remain a big problem, as in the present situation each assistant upazila education officer has to inspect 41 schools on average -- a number that goes up to 212 in many places. So, the monitoring officials do not regularly visit all the schools.

But, whether the children at all learn anything or not, whether the teachers come or not, the parents want their children to go to school.

Even in the remotest Bhagabatipur Char, Shefali, Monir, Haider, Laila and Arun were plodding through the vast sandy expanse with a few dirty, torn books in hand.

"Yes, I go to school every day," says Monir. "It's fun. We can play there a lot and get biscuits free."

"If I am at home," Laila, a scrawny fourth grader, smiles, "my mother will force me to work. I will have to wash cooking pots. It's better to go to school."

"We want our children to be educated," Shakoor, 49, a day labourer in Kakmari village of Pabna, sounds thoughtful. "If they can read and write, they can't be cheated." Once, a Tk 5,000 loan was thrust down on Shakoor by a moneylender, although he claims to have taken only Tk 1,000. But the moneylender had all documents ready to prove that Shakoor had taken Tk 5,000.

But, that hope for a better educated generation looks doubtful as children like Laila, Monir and Haider keep going to schools that teach little and care even less.

They only feed the statistics book, inflating the literacy figures, belying the truth.

(This is the fifth of the seven-part series)

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Crowley hopes

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details of the opposition's agenda. But he knows about the voter enrolment issue that needs to be settled so that all eligible voters can exercise their franchise on the election day, he said, adding all political parties have the responsibility to ensure that.

When asked if he feels that human rights of the religious minorities are being violated in Bangladesh, the congressman said some minority groups expressed their concerns but also appreciated "some positive steps" of the prime minister to protect their houses, places of worship and right to worship.

He lauded Bangladesh as a moderate Islamic democracy. The archbishop he met on Tuesday told him, "I think some positive steps have taken place," he reported to the conference.

Crowley, a co-sponsor of the Trade Bill, 2005 seeking duty-free access of Bangladeshi goods to the USA, said it is a bit difficult now to get the bill passed with bipartisan support, as they are heading for the mid-term elections in November. The bill is now pending in the US Senate.

However, he hoped the bill would be passed sometime in 2007.

About the purpose of this visit, the third since 1998, Crowley said he has come to thank the government for the steps against trafficking in women and children that helped the country move up to category-2, and also to appreciate the steps to curb child labour.

He once again thanked Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for protecting the interests of the minority communities but expressed concerns at the growing trend of fundamentalism. He said he is also concerned about corruption, as Bangladesh has been ranked as the most corrupt nation by Transparency International for five times.

Crowley said the August 17 countrywide orchestrated bomb blasts sent a "wake-up call" not only to the people of Bangladesh but also to the world about how well coordinated attacks can be launched by the outfits like the JMB.

He appreciated the prime minister's determination to rout the terrorists and destroy their networks, saying the prime minister clearly stated that fundamentalism would not be tolerated in Bangladesh.

Crowley also commended Khaleda Zia for setting up the Counter-Terrorism Bureau with the assistance of US experts to enhance the capability of Bangladeshi security personnel through special training programmes.

When asked about the state of tolerance in the USA, as he preached about it, he said, "America is not perfect on all counts," but it is better than others, adding they also always try to make things "more perfect".

Crowley said he had opposed the US decision after the 9/11 to put 24 Arabian and Muslim countries includ-

ing Bangladesh on a list requiring their citizens to go through a special process of registration to travel to the US. He also opposed the US move to deport 40,000 people staying in the states without valid documents, he told the press.

Describing the Bangladesh-US relations as very good and improving, the congressman said on his return to Washington he would tell the US secretary of state and his friends to appreciate Bangladesh's efforts to fight against terrorism. He also promised to try to maintain the US aid flow to Bangladesh.

American Center Director Jonathan Cebra and Chief Information Officer AA Ahmed Ali were present at the conference.

Judiciary

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Division was absent due to illness.

The Appellate Division bench chaired by Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain fixed March 1 for the next hearing.

The Supreme Court on February 1 rejected the government's prayer for the 22nd time for separation of judiciary and asked barrister M Amir-UI Islam to file an updated petition regarding contempt in 'violating the Supreme Court's 12-point directive'.

In his contempt petition filed on April 13, 2004, barrister Amir accused three secretaries for violating the Supreme Court's 12-point directive in framing rules for forming Judicial Service Commission. While updating his petition yesterday, he also brought charge against six other bureaucrats.

The nine officials are prime minister's Principal Secretary Dr Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, Law Secretary Alauddin Sardar, former law secretary Asaduzzaman, Establishment Secretary Mahbubur Rahman, Cabinet Secretary ASM Abdul Halim, Home Secretary and former establishment secretary Safer Raj Hossain, former establishment secretary Anwarul Bar Chowdhury, Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan and former finance secretary Siddiqui Rahman.

Attorney General AJ Mohammad Ali yesterday submitted government proceedings on the Supreme Court's 12-point directives.

The accused government officials against whom the Supreme Court issued contempt rule for distorting the 12-point directive appeared in person before the court and they will have to appear in person before the Appellate Division on March 1.

The Supreme Court on November 29, 2004 had issued the contempt rule upon the nine officials for distorting the SC directives.

India awaits flu tests

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Europe, into Africa and now India, where hundreds of millions of people live in rural areas side-by-side with livestock and domestic fowl.

Experts fear it is just a matter of time before the virus mutates and spreads easily among people, triggering a pandemic.

Indian health workers, some wringing the necks of chickens, others using poison, are carrying out a mass cull of birds to try to stamp out the country's first outbreak of the virus.

The dozen quarantined people have been placed in an isolation ward at a hospital in Navapur town in the western state of Maharashtra, where H5N1 was found in poultry on Saturday.

Those quarantined either had flu-like symptoms or were kept there as a precautionary measure. Blood samples from dozens of other people were also being tested, officials said.

"The initial results are expected today (Wednesday) evening," Vijay Satbir Singh, Maharashtra's top health official, told Reuters. "We are keeping our fingers crossed."

Adding to fears, there were reports of more poultry dying beyond Maharashtra, where the sudden deaths of 50,000 birds heralded the initial outbreak.

Malaysian Health Minister Chua Soi Lek told reporters the seven residents lived within 300 metres of the affected area on the edge of the capital, Kuala Lumpur, where 40 infected chickens died last week in the country's first outbreak in more than a year.

"Those warded are the ones exposed to the chickens," he said, using a common term for admission to hospital.

In Brussels, EU animal health experts considered requests from France and the Netherlands, Europe's biggest poultry producers, to be allowed to vaccinate millions of birds against avian influenza. Talks on the request are continuing.

Bird flu has killed more than 90 people since 2003. Despite its rapid march around the globe, it remains hard for people to catch. But if it mutates, a pandemic could bring economic chaos and overwhelm health services.

Migratory birds are thought to be at least one way the disease is being carried and more than 30 countries have reported cases since 2003, seven of them recording human infections.

In Indonesia, where the virus is endemic in poultry, a Health Ministry official said a 27-year-old woman who lived in the capital had died of bird flu, according to local hospital tests. If confirmed by the World Health Organization (WHO), the woman would be the 20th Indonesian to die from avian flu.

Major Shia shrine

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casualties were reported.

An aerial photograph released by the US military showed the 20-meter (33-foot) wide dome reduced to a shell of broken masonry and twisted iron, with nearby buildings also wrecked.

An Interior Ministry spokesman said the attackers wore police uniforms, tied up the mosque guards and set the charges.

National Security Adviser Mowaffaq al-Rubaie, a Shia, who blamed the attack on al Qaeda, told state television 10 suspects had been arrested. "They will fail to draw the Iraqi people into civil war as they have failed in the past," he said.

As gunmen attacked Sunni mosques, Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, a Shia, declared three days of mourning and called for Muslim unity. He said the interim government had sent officials to Samarra, 100 km north of Baghdad.

SHIA PROTESTS
Thousands of people marched in Shia towns across the country and through the capital, condemning the Samarra attack.

Black-clad militiamen of the Mehdi Army, loyal to Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, were out in force in Shia strongholds like Sadr City in Baghdad and the southern city of Samawa.

In nearby Diwaniya, a local government official said a Mehdi militiaman was killed in clashes with Sunni residents. Some shopkeepers closed their stores for the mourning period.

US officials, most recently ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad on Monday, are pressing Jaafari to form a cabinet with support across the nation to avert the threat of a civil war that could thwart Washington's efforts to withdraw its 130,000 troops Jaafari angrily dismissed the envoy's intervention.

Sunni rebels are strong in Samarra and there have been attacks recently on Shia pilgrims visiting the shrine to the revered 9th-century Imam Ali al-Hadi and his son, Imam Hassan al-Askari. Shia Web sites said relics of the buried imams, including a helmet and shield, were damaged in the explosions.

In the holy city of Najaf, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, revered by millions of Shias and a key force for restraint in the face of Sunni insurgent attacks, made a rare call for protests and declared seven days of mourning.

He insisted in a statement, however, that there must be no violence and in particular no reprisals against Sunni mosques.

Outside his office, where Sistani was meeting his most senior colleagues, 2,00