

Kansat agitators attack cops

FROM PAGE 1
A large number of fresh logs and abandoned electric poles were laid yesterday on a 15 kilometers stretch of the road from Pukuria to Sonamasajid, disrupting communication with the land port.

The police yesterday morning tried to escort a number of stranded trucks through Bholahat and Naogaon but failed as the locals dug up the road near a culvert at Abbasbazar.

The villagers demonstrated during the hartal hours and said they are ready to resist any conspiracy to foil the hartal in five unions of Kansat, Mobarakpur, Shahbajpur, Chawk Kirit and Dhal Pukuria.

A huge procession of local people paraded Kansat and adjacent areas in the afternoon. The protesters warned the government of dire consequences if their leader Golam Rabbani was harassed or hurt.

MINU TERMS THEM 'TERRORISTS'

Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu MP at a press conference at Chapainawabganj yesterday said a terrorists' group in the name of Palli Biduyt Unnayan Sangram Parishad (PBUSP) is responsible for Thursday's skir-

mishes. He said the government is taking action against the "terrorists."

"The [PBUSP] leaders are now collecting toll from villagers for running the movement. They forced many of our party leaders and workers to leave villages," alleged Minu, a lawmaker of the ruling BNP.

Minu said the PBUSP leaders on March 5 promised not to continue the movement for power as most of their 14 demands were fulfilled by that time.

"Despite the fact, they organised the procession to kill our party leaders. They were equipped with swords, bows and arrows," the mayor said adding that common people were not with the PBUSP leaders.

Local lawmakers Shahjahan Miah, Harun-ul Rashid and Jamaat leaders Rafiqul Islam were present at the press conference.

Lawmaker Shahjahan Miah told the press conference that PBUSP Convener Golam Rabbani was misguiding the local people.

Meanwhile, Chapainawabganj SP Mahfujul Islam told The Daily Star that police had recorded two murder cases against Rabbani and others.

The cases were filed by relatives

of BNP leader Mahbubul Alam and tea seller Masir who were killed during the violence on Thursday, he said.

But Officer-in-Charge of Shibganj Police Station Golam Kibria yesterday evening said no cases were recorded.

RABBANI FEELS INSECURE
PBUSP Convener Golam Rabbani yesterday demanded security from the government and sought the prime minister's intervention. He alleged that local BNP leaders were threatening to kill him.

When asked about the case, Rabbani said: "We don't care about the cases. We care only for the people's demands for power. They filed cases before, even arrested and tortured us, but were forced to free us."

Asked about BNP's claim of fulfillment of their demands, Rabbani said those were just promises on papers, never translated into reality.

"It is lawmaker Shahjahan Miah who is creating all problems. We don't want him to get involved in resolving our problems," he said.

Fag-end borrowing

FROM PAGE 16
Chowdhury were also present.

Prof Mohammad Ali Taslim moderated the discussion on 'Monetary Policy of Bangladesh: Balancing Inflation and Growth' jointly organised by NCC Bank and Development Initiative at a city hotel.

In the first seven months of the current fiscal year, the government has borrowed about Tk 50 billion [\$715 million] from the domestic market, mentioned former caretaker government adviser Wahiduddin Mahmud. Recently, it has taken \$250 million short-term commercial loans from overseas sources, he said, adding, "I heard it also plans to borrow \$500 million more, also on short-term basis, from abroad."

Wahiduddin reckoned the government would have to spend about \$1 billion this fiscal year to subsidise the domestic petroleum prices.

He severely criticised such government borrowing and its petroleum policy, and said the deadline for refunding the loans falls in the time of the next caretaker government. Considering the improbability of the present government clearing the massive credit in the remaining few months of its office, "the burden will fall on the caretaker government," Wahiduddin predicted.

But, as a caretaker government is not empowered to decide on such a critical issue, "the economy will be in a very vulnerable situation. A crisis of one billion dollar can shatter our balance of payment situation," he cautioned.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, the country's leading independent think-tank, seconded Wahiduddin's views, "The next caretaker government will have to address the burdens of fuel subsidies and the mid-term overseas borrowing."

Debapriya also pointed out that Bangladesh this year has received only \$500 million foreign aid against the committed \$1.5 billion, which has aggravated the foreign exchange crisis.

Turning to inflation, one of the session's main focuses, Wahiduddin said the existing contractionary monetary policy alone is not enough to contain the current high rate of inflation. The government also has to increase the supply of consumer products, of which there is now an acute crisis.

He said the soaring commodity prices due to inflation do not benefit the farmers and industrial producers, but only help the extortionists, middlemen and hoarders make fast money.

The veteran economist was also critical of the government for allowing foreign direct investments without studying their merits, saying all FDIs are not favourable for the country.

Wahiduddin said the country has received FDI mainly in infrastructure and service sector where the investors have an intention to get back their limited amounts of investment and start making profit within a very short time.

"Such FDIs put a serious pressure on the balance of payment instead of supporting it," he observed.

He suggested forming a committee by the Bangladesh Bank (BB) to scrutinise the external sector impact of the FDIs before allowing any.

Taking part in the discussion BB Governor Salehuddin Ahmed said the inflation rate has come down to 6.59 percent in this month from 7.05 in November. He attributed the inflation rate hike to the increased prices of petroleum products, edible oils, sugar and fertilisers in the global market.

12 die in Maoists raids

FROM PAGE 16
began at 10 a.m. (0415 GMT).

Armoured personnel carriers, mounted with heavy machine guns, were stationed at several main thoroughfares of the city while security vehicles carrying dozens of armed forces drove through main streets.

"Residents should not come out of their houses. Security forces could shoot violators or police could arrest them and jail them up to one month," the government's curfew announcement said.

Soldiers yesterday shot dead a demonstrator in a western Nepali city, a political leader said, as opposition parties postponed a massive pro-democracy rally in the capital.

The army had gunned down the demonstrator in the popular tourist town of Pokhara, 200km west of Kathmandu, said K.P. Oli, vice general secretary of the Nepal Communist (Unified Marxist-Leninist) party.

The measure was seen as a bid by the government to avert a much-awaited showdown between the parties and the king on Saturday, the day the Himalayan kingdom marks the 16th anniversary of democracy.

"This is the defeated mentality of the government. How long will they impose curfew and arrest people?" said Amrit Kumar Bohara, a top leader of the Communist Party of Nepal (UML), the country's second largest political group.

"The protests will continue. We can't stop them. If not in Kathmandu, we'll hold them in other cities," he told Reuters.

The rally and the protests are part of a four-day nationwide strike that began on Thursday and has shut down the country.

On Friday, hundreds of students burned tyres, hurled stones and chanted pro-democracy slogans as they fought pitched battles with police firing tear gas.

"You can't solve the problem with curfew. It hurts ordinary people," said Suraraj Bhattarai, who works in a Kathmandu restaurant.

"People are rising against suppression and they cannot be crushed like this," he said.

Analysts said Saturday's protests would be crucial.

"Emotions are building up and more and more people are coming out and openly opposing the king," said Yubraj Ghimire, editor of the popular magazine Samay.

"There may be a breakthrough soon if political parties succeed in their current plans."

King Gyanendra seized power 14 months ago and sacked the government, saying politicians had failed to tackle a bloody Maoist revolt that has killed more than 13,000 people so far.

The Maoists, who have been waging a bloody battle since 1996 to topple the monarchy, formed a loose alliance with political parties against the king in November.

In the latest violence, the rebels attacked two towns in west Nepal overnight in which nine guerrillas and three troops were killed, officials said.

One attack took place in Butwal town, about 300 km west of Kathmandu, and the other in Taulihawa town, in a neighbouring district.

"We could not sleep the entire night. We could hear gunshots and explosions. We are scared," Butwal housewife Pushpa Pokhareel said by telephone.

A break up of the death toll in the two attacks was not immediately available, officials said.

Shahidul buried

FROM PAGE 16
to district AL office around 1:00pm and held a rally there.

AL lawmaker Sayed Ashraf Islam, BNP lawmaker Mujibur Rahman Manju and other district AL leaders addressed the rally.

Shahidul's namaz-e-janaza was held following the rally and he was laid to rest at his family graveyard.

On contact, Officer-in-charge of Kishoreganj Police Station Niaz Mohammad said policemen were deployed at Shadullachar to keep the situation under control.

A case was filed with Kishoreganj Police Station yesterday accusing 15 people in connection with the killing of Shahidul.

Police have so far arrested 10 people. They are Moazzem Hussen Rubel, 28, Kobir Rabbani Jewel, 36, Novel, 23, Babul Mia, 42, Sabuj Mia, 29, Al-Amin, 19, Dulal, 60, Mamun, 26, Akber Hossen Renu, 50, Awal Khan, 38.

Of the accused Angur Mia, 32, Alfad Khan, 55, Babul Khan, 22, Abdur Rahim Khan, 55 and Samsuzzaman Sarkar, 50 are still at large.

BSF kills 1

FROM PAGE 16
patrol team opened fire on Abu Taleb, 35, son of Abdul Jabbar, when he was grazing cattle on a land near the border at about 2:00pm. He died instantly.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) commander of 22 Rifles Battalion Lt Col Firoz said they have sent a letter to the BSF condemning the killing.

"Tension heightened in the bordering area as both BDR and BSF reinforced their strengths and geared up patrol," says a spot report from the area.

Macabre livelihood

FROM PAGE 1
in refrigerator, and cutting and cracking them open. The painful burden of handing over the bodily remains of the dead to their relatives also has frequently spiked his days. So did the late-night thuds on his door by the police to wake him up to receive fresh casualties.

In the uncannily quiet morgue, an occasional mutilated face punctuates the lines of bloated bodies, on which he has to work with an old-fashioned hammer and a kitchen knife.

He frowns, as he mentions his least favourite task, "I don't like splitting the skulls. They are too hard. Besides, I have to remain extra-careful to keep the things inside intact." He also has to bear with the lack of supplies of disinfectants, chloroform and even hot water at the morgue.

A quarter century of the macabre work has taken its toll on Sekandar. These days, however, his workload has become a bit lighter thanks to his younger brother joining in, looking forward to take the reigns after Sekandar calls it a quit. For 10 bodies a day in the past, Sekandar now takes care of only one or two of the messier jobs.

A deep sense of guilt from dealing with the dead has meanwhile changed the way of his thinking about life, he says, and for solace he has turned to Islam. He converted to Islam two years ago and changed his name from Ramesh to Sekandar.

This, he reckons, is the start of a new life for not only himself but also his entire family. His two children have had education and his resolution about their future is firm, "I made up my mind a long time ago, my son will never be imprisoned in this morgue like me."

Patients desert

FROM PAGE 1
seen using inexperienced medical students as helping hands while conducting surgeries on patients in a few wards.

According to CMCH sources, over 150 previously admitted patients left the hospital yesterday following unavailability of medical services.

Intern Doctors Association (IDA) of CMCH yesterday at a rally, which was followed by a two-hour scheduled token sit-in programme, announced that they would shut down the administrative office today.

IDA leaders at the rally presided over by its convener Dr Moniruzzaman Maruf vowed to continue the strike until their demand for payment of increased allowance is met.

They also issued a 24-hour ultimatum to CMCH authorities to fulfil their demands. Otherwise they threatened to paralyse administrative activities for an indefinite period from tomorrow. The ultimatum will end this afternoon.

Meanwhile, sufferings of the admitted patients and the admission seekers were beyond description while on-duty doctors faced tremendous pressure to provide treatment yesterday as it was a scheduled day for admissions at different wards.

Sources said usually on an average 30 to 35 new patients are admitted to each ward on an admission day.

While visiting the hospital at 10:00am yesterday around 30 to 50 beds were found empty in different wards.

A doctor's assistant of ward No 24 Md Selim said it was the scheduled admission day for the ward and to accommodate the newcomers they had discharged some of the

patients early in the morning considering their good conditions and to accommodate the newcomers.

There were 65 patients in ward 24 yesterday but the number was around 100 on Friday and 150 on Thursday, sources said.

Only 10 new patients were admitted to the ward till 1:00pm yesterday while usually on such a day around 30 to 35 patients get admissions, Selim said.

Shaful Alam, 42, of Hathajari was seen lying on the floor of the ward No 24 who had undergone a surgery a week ago.

He alleged that like him six other patients were lying on the floor and were being deprived of their required dressings for the last four days resulting in infections in their wounds.

Asif, a 3rd year student of Chittagong Medical College (CMC), said the doctors in operation theatre had to use some 3rd year students for helps like dressing, passing the forceps, helping in pulling the skin of a patient, etc which are usually done by the intern doctors.

An honorary medical officer (HMO) of ward no 27, asking not to be named, echoed Asif. He also said they had five surgeries scheduled yesterday but feared that they might cancel three of those for lack of hands.

Dr Nur Har Begum, acting director of CMCH, refused to comment on the situation and asked this correspondent to wait for Brigadier General Abedur Rahman, the hospital director, who is now in Malaysia and likely to join the office on April 13.

Oli assault

FROM PAGE 1
Talking to newsmen in Cox's Bazar on Wednesday, the veteran freedom fighter also called upon all to stand against criminals and corrupt elements irrespective of their party affiliation.

Meanwhile, Oli's present stand has apparently inspired a large number of BNP leaders and activists in Chittagong. Cox's Bazar and Bandarban, who have long felt neglected in the party, to rally round him.

These aggrieved party men are now insisting on Oli's contesting the next election from their constituencies as he had played an important role in putting the party on a strong footing in those areas, party insiders said.

Talking to The Daily Star on Friday, the BNP leader said he worked for strengthening the party not only in this region but also throughout the country.

"Many of the party leaders and activists want me to contest the next election from all the five constituen-

cies in South Chittagong. But those in Cox's Bazar and Bandarban want me to contest from their constituencies," he told this correspondent over phone.

In reply to a question, Oli said only time would say what he would do in this regard.

He however added that around 60 per cent of the people of South Chittagong live in Chittagong-9 constituency, one of the two most vital seats in the port city.

Oli declined to make any comment when asked if he thinks his present stand would lead him to the fate similar to BNP lawmaker Abu Hena, who was ousted from the party for his remarks about party high ups' links to militants.

He said his campaign against criminals and corrupt people would continue.

Oli also refused to say anything when asked if he would form a separate platform if his party ignored his recent allegations.

Tigers aim to put

FROM PAGE 16
outsirts of the city, which will make its Test debut after hosting two one-day internationals last month.

Nor'wester, a frequent phenomenon during this time of the year, could come into play against the Australians. Weathermen have predicted light rain and thunder-shower during the afternoon sessions.

Everybody is realistic about the prospect in the series considering the fact that Ricky Ponting's men are clear at the top of the table while Bangladesh are at the bottom in the ten-team Test rankings.

But the recent good showing of the Tigers have made many believe that the home side might utilise home advantage to show a much better performance than their maiden engagement.

The Tigers for the first time are going to face leg-spin wizard Shane Warne, the highest wicket-taker with 674 scalps in Tests, and he is expected to exploit the slow and turning conditions along with another leggie Stuart MacGill.

Bangladesh have announced their team with inform paceman Syed Rassel making way for fellow quick Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza, who will share the new ball with Shahadat Hossain.

Dashing middle-order batsman Aftab Ahmed, who was ignored during home series against Sri Lanka, also gets the nod, replacing all-rounder Alok Kapali.

Opener Nafees Iqbal is the other player sidelined to make way for Rajin Saleh who played his last Test against England in June last year. Rajin was rewarded for his brilliant hundred against Kenya in the last one-day game in the preceding series.

On the other hand, Australia have recalled fast bowler Jason Gillespie and middle-order batsman Michael Clarke for the first Test. Clarke last played a Test match against the West Indies in November and has sat on the bench during the recent South Africa series while Gillespie makes his return after Australia dropped him during the Ashes last year.

This Test is also significant in that

it will see both the on-field umpires -- Aleem Dar and Nadeem Ghauri -- hail from Pakistan. Only Australian and West Indian umpires have shared this glory in the past.

TEAMS
BANGLADESH: Habibul Bashar (captain), Khaled Mashud, Javed Omar, Rajin Saleh, Mohammad Ashraf, Shahriar Nafees, Aftab Ahmed, Mohammad Rafique, Enamul Haque, Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza and Shahadat Hossain.

AUSTRALIA: Ricky Ponting (captain), Adam Gilchrist, Matthew Hayden, Damien Martyn, Michael Hussey, Michael Clarke, Shane Warne, Stuart MacGill, Brett Lee, Jason Gillespie and Stuart Clark.

Family hopes

FROM PAGE 1
Dhaka Cantonment.

"The place of the grave and a memorial plaque of Matur at the southwest corner of the Bijo Sarani was formally inaugurated by the then state minister for liberation war affairs on March 31, 2003. But regrettably the place has been changed as authorities said a pipeline would go through the place," said Milly Rahman, wife of Matur.

"We do not want him buried in a restricted area where no one could go and pay tribute to him. We want him reinstated in a grave at an open place in the city where he was born," she added.

Prof Alauddin Al Azad read out a written speech and said though the authorities showed four different places for his grave, it has been decided to place him in the Kurmitola area of Dhaka Cantonment without the consent of his family members.

Among others Dr Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, journalist Jagul Ahmed Chowdhury, Mahfujullah and relatives of Birsreshtha Matur Rahman were present at the conference.

While talking to The Daily Star the State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Rezaul Karim said the date for the return of Matur's remains is yet to be fixed and processing of legal papers is going on. The government is trying its best to bring his remains back as soon as possible, he added.

Fire breaks out

FROM PAGE 1
"Of course it is a sabotage. Miscreants did it to destroy the peaceful atmosphere inside the parliament building," the speaker told reporters as he rushed to his office hearing the news.

The speaker immediately held a meeting with the deputy speaker, chief whip, the parliament secretary and other top officials to review security of the parliament building.

Talking to The Daily Star, Deputy Speaker Akhtar Hamid Siddiqui said he guessed some officials caused the blaze with an ill motive. "Security has been tightened after the incident," he said.

Another probe body was formed, headed by Faruk Ahmed, additional commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan police.

Officials of intelligence agencies rushed to the spot. Law enforcers cordoned off the three places and none was allowed to go there.

Parliament secretariat officials said part of the carpet leading to the speaker's office was gutted. Besides, five files with official documents were burnt in one of the two rooms on the fourth floor and the fittings in the other room on the sixth floor were damaged.

Parliament sources said some miscreants set fire to create panic. "Officials and employees were not present because of the weekend today (Saturday), and the miscreants might have taken advantage of this," a senior official said seeking anonymity.

One source said tension is prevailing in the parliament secretariat for the last few days over promotion of some officials and forgery of educational certificates of some others.

The speaker has recently ordered a probe into the allegation of certificate forgery.

Extend N-deal

FROM PAGE 16
programme was not Pakistan-centric.

Aziz said a deal on the lines of one reached between India and United States was also important for Pakistan as its economy is growing at six to eight per cent a year and its "energy needs are very acute." Pakistan believes that if it can have more avenues of peaceful production of nuclear energy under IAEA safeguards and guidelines to meet its growing electricity needs that would be good for the country and the region, he said.

To question about US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's statement that Washington had no plans to extend the nuclear deal to Pakistan, Aziz said "I have said that Pakistan's energy needs are similar and we would like this opportunity to be used to come up with nuclear restraint environment".

16 Indians

FROM PAGE 16
nationals, including women and children, were staying in no-man's land of Jhan-Jhan Ichhakhali border near Pillar No 122 under the open sky until 8:30pm, BDR said.

Locals said the BSF of Lal Bazar outpost tried to push the Indians forcibly to Bangladesh territory at 12 noon, when the BDR of Ichhakhali outpost along with the villagers thwarted the bid.

BDR remained on guard against any renewed attempt to push them into Bangladesh.

Observer status

FROM PAGE 16
effects of Safta (South Asian Free Trade Area) agreements for promotion of economic and trade cooperation.

Foreign ministry sources said after finalising the modalities and guidelines, the Saarc Secretariat will seek formal applications from Afghanistan, China and Japan for their inclusion in the association.

The standing committee might refer the cases of USA, EU and South Korea to the Saarc Council of Ministers Meeting.

Since Afghanistan, China and Japan have been included as member and observers, there may be no objection to granting observer status to these three new applicants, a high official of foreign ministry said preferring anonymity.

The applications of US, EU and South Korea may be taken up during the next Saarc Summit to be held in India next year for the approval of the summit leaders, the official said adding that the Saarc Council of Ministers may grant these countries observer status earlier if the heads of state or government give clearance in the meantime.

The new member and observers will be allowed to join the summit and other meetings from the 14th Saarc Summit next year.

Meanwhile, US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher said the US wants to work actively to promote free trade in the South Asia region.

"We recently approached the Saarc's secretary general for observer status," Boucher told businessmen and reporters at a meeting organised on Friday in New Delhi by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

"Safta is an opportunity for all the countries of South Asia to help make free trade in the region a reality and to establish links to Central Asian organisations," he said as reported by the Times of India.

Consensus hope

FROM PAGE 1
hand, will pursue the policy of resisting the opposition on the streets like it did on several occasions.

LITTLE PROGRESS IN RESOLVING THE DISPUTE
In last eight months since the 14-party opposition alliance announced its proposals for reforms, there had been little progress towards an agreement on the issue.

The ruling alliance, which had outright rejected the proposals in last July, later urged the opposition to place the reform proposals in parliament. Then after six months, the AL placed the proposals in parliament on February 12.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on February 28 in parliament proposed forming a committee to discuss the reform agenda.

She, however, did not clarify how the committee would be formed. If the government were sincere, political observers say, the prime minister would have specified the formation of the committee much earlier.

The ruling BNP took 20 days to send a letter to the opposition, calling for them to nominate the persons to be in the committee.

On March 14, Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain talked to Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid, offering him to discuss the formation of the committee. The following day the opposition asked the government to specify in writing the terms of reference of the committee to be formed.

On March 20, BNP Secretary General and LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan sent a letter to AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, seeking names of the opposition representatives in the proposed committee. The letter however did not mention anything regarding formation of the committee.

On March 22, Jalil replied to Bhuiyan's letter, asking for details on the format of the committee, its mandate, time frame and the number of its members.

In his reply on March 30, the LGRD and co-operatives minister wanted the names of five to represent the opposition in the committee.

Jalil, also convener of 14-party, on April 6 asked the government to form the committee drawing members from AL and BNP while leaving ruling coalition partner Jamaat out of the line-up of discussants.

As of yesterday, BNP Secretary General did not reply to Jalil's last