

Cops raid villages

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indefinite strike enforced by the villagers' forum, Palli Bidyut Unnayan Sangram Parishad (PBUSP).

The six people killed yesterday were identified as Anwar, a 10-year-old boy of Shibanagar Jaigirpara, Babu, 18, of Sonapara village, Shahin, 20, of Chokkitti village, Sahimuddin, 36, and Monsur, 40, of Bianbazar, and Abdul Rahman, 63, a teacher at Shibanagar High School. The furious villagers were holding processions with the bodies.

With yesterday's killings, the death toll of Kansat movement now stands at 20. Earlier, two people were killed on January 4, seven on January 23, four on April 6 and one injured that day died yesterday.

Ironically, while visiting the area yesterday, Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, who is also the minister in charge of Chapainabganj, admitted that the PBUSP demands were 'just' and the authorities would fulfil those. He also hinted at holding talks in a couple of days.

LATE-NIGHT RAMPAGE
Yesterday's police frenzy began at about 12:30am when a group of demonstrating villagers captured Kansat crossroads, which police had been guarding for several days. About 1,000 villagers with sticks and machetes chased the police sentries away from the spot to Dhobpukur, about one kilometre off Kansat.

A contingent of police then started to advance towards the crossroads to capture it back, firing at the villagers to disperse them, witnesses said. In face of the police action, the demonstrators retreated towards Abbasbazar.

A band of furious police then entered Gopalanagar, Abbasbazar, Hothatpara, Shibanagar, and Banglabari villages, and wrecked and looted many houses, locals alleged.

When villagers started to protest against the police savagery in different villages and on some roads, police vandalised 20 more houses in Poshchim Pukuria village, the home of PBUSP Convenor Golam Rabbani, at 3:30am.

At 11:30am, when the locals gathered at different points in the five agitating unions with sticks and machetes, a number of police teams entered villages on both sides of Abbasbazar Road and beat up people indiscriminately. They ransacked a number of houses during the raids that continued until 12:45pm.

Injured at the police brutality, a procession of several hundred villagers started marching towards Kansat crossroads at 4:45pm. As police chased them, the demonstrators retaliated by hurling bricksbats at them.

Police chased the protestors seven kilometres to Karimbazar, where about 4,000 police and Armed Police Battalion members from Dhaka, Rajshahi and Khulna ranged locked in a fierce battle with them.

Police this time entered Abbasbazar, Mohilabazar, Karimbazar, Kurtabazar, Shibanagar, Gopalpur, Baghdurgapur, Kolabari, Poshchim Pukuria, Bohlabari, Dhobpukur and Dhobrabazar villages and beat up whomever they found on their way.

Demonstrators took their injured fellows away while fresh groups of villagers with sticks and machetes stepped forward to fight the law enforcers.

Although the Section 144 was imposed on a 17-kilometre stretch of road, police went into action outside the area and fired at villagers with AK-47s, 303 rifles and shotguns. They also fired rubber bullets and lobbed tear gas canisters. The police action continued until 6:00pm.

Injured villagers said police even assaulted the women and looted money and valuables from their houses. Police this time held 20 people and beat them up severely.

A witness said he saw three bodies including one shot in the eye lying on Abbasbazar road.

Police did not let journalists go near Karimbazar, the centre of the clashes. Journalists who were

standing about 700 yards off Karimbazar said they heard several hundred gunshots and at least 10 big bangs.

As the newsmen insisted on knowing the names of the arrested, Additional Superintendent of Police Kamrul Ahsan asked them to keep mum. "If you try to create trouble, we'll shoot you, too," he retorted, pointing a gun at five reporters at Hothatpara.

After the 11:30am-12:45pm police action, the villagers of Hindu majority Baghdurgapur told The Daily Star that a police shot Bholanath, 70, a mentally retarded person, on the right arm with a shotgun, though his relatives pleaded with them not to hurt him.

Sanskriti Das, Krishna Das and Koneklate Das said police beat them up at gunpoint and took away Tk 50,000 and five tolas of gold from their houses.

Moktara, wife of Kabirul of Baghdurgapur, said police pinned her down to the ground and assaulted her.

MINU FOR TALKS
While visiting Hothatpara Bazar at 2:00pm yesterday, Rajshahi City Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, who passed the entire day in Chapainabganj, met some elderly women and assured them that the situation will become normal soon.

"You will not have any problem, we'll release all the arrestees within two hours," he told the elderly locals whose relatives had left the area in the morning in fear of police action.

Asking the residents to bring back those who had fled the villages, he said, "All your demands will be fulfilled. We'll sit for talks."

A few minutes later, Minu told the reporters that the protest was not in demand for electricity but against corruption of the local Rural Electrification Board officials and employees.

The villagers' demands are just, he said, adding, "I've talked to Rabbani; we'll sit for talks in a couple of days."

"In case of those demands that I'll not be able to fulfil, the state minister for power will come here and hold talks," he said.

Responding to the demands made by Golam Rabbani, Minu urged his protesting followers to refrain from destructive and anarchic activities and to fix a time and venue for the meeting so that it could be held in a congenial atmosphere, reports BSS.

Assuring his all-out cooperation in releasing those who were arrested without any specific charges, he urged the protesting Kansat people to refrain from the path of violence and to create an atmosphere of discussion so the problems could be solved.

Asked whether the police action can be termed as barbaric, Inspector General of Police Abdul Quayyum said, "It can't be termed barbaric. What the police have done, they have done to uphold the law and order."

Probe body

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immediately after the incident was given extended time earlier as it failed to submit the report within 24 hours of the incident.

"The committee needs to question more officials to complete its report," Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar told reporters at his office about the extension of time limit.

On the morning of April 8, the fire mysteriously broke out in front of the speaker's office and in two other rooms burning some documents.

The closed circuit television (CCTV) surveillance system of the Sangsad Bhaban was closed at the time of the incident. Due to this, the probe body is finding it hard to identify any suspects or find clues leading to the culprits, sources said.

The speaker earlier said that insiders are involved with the incident aimed at discrediting him and parliament. "Had the CCTVs been functioning, it would have been easy to find out the miscreants," the speaker said the next day of the incident.

SC hearing of CEC's

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Commission (EC) to prepare a new voter list on the basis of the current one.

The directive was issued following two writ petitions filed by three Awami League lawmakers.

Counsels for the plaintiffs yesterday argued before the full bench of the SC in favour of the HC directive. Barrister Amir-UI Islam, a counsel for the plaintiffs, said according to the constitution there should be a permanent electoral roll and it should be updated. He said there is no legal provision for creating a fresh voter list. The EC can make a fresh electoral roll in a constituency only if it finds gross irregularities.

Barrister Rakanuddin Mahmud, another counsel for the plaintiffs said the EC cannot drop any name from the voter list except of a deceased person or of an insane person or of a person who left the country.

He raised the question that if an enumerator visits a house of an existing voter and doesn't find him or her in the house at the moment, should that person's name be dropped from the voter list? Rokan also said if a person is 18 years old, the person becomes eligible to be a voter and he or she should be included on the voter list.

The five-member full bench of the Appellate Division headed by

Chief Justice Syed JR Mudassar Husain heard the submissions and decided to continue the hearing today.

Australian

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there will be a full-time AFP office there from next year."

"The ABC report says, 'Terrorism experts around the globe are increasingly worried about the rise of Islamic extremism in Bangladesh and the potential of the nation to turn into a haven for terrorists.'"

"Bangladesh's central location makes it a good transit point for radicals who want to move from Pakistan and Afghanistan into South East Asia," the report adds.

The AFP move shows that Australia's national security depends heavily on how well other countries in the region can tackle trans-national crimes, including terrorism, drug trafficking and identity fraud, ABC says.

Asked about this yesterday, a top police official said he has no information that the government has taken any decision in this regard. "I don't think there has been any decision yet," he said, preferring anonymity.

Miladunnabi

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government and private buildings while banners inscribed with "Kalema Taiyaba" were displayed at road islands and intersections in the capital.

Islamic Foundation Bangladesh organised programmes, including was mahfil, qirat mahfil, and a month-long Islamic book fair on the premises of Baitul Mokarram National Mosque.

Awami League held a milad mahfil at its central office after Asr prayers.

Jaker Party brought out a colourful procession from the city's Muktangan on the occasion.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels aired special programmes while newspapers published special articles on the day.

PM

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Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Khandker Mosharrar Hossain, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Political Secretary to the PM Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar, State Minister for Civil and Tourism Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, chiefs of the three services, diplomats and senior civil and military officials were present at the airport to see her off.

Khaleda Zia is expected to return home on April 15.

Dhanmondi

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President of Dhanmondi Club, Ilyasur Rahman Babul said they are forced to hold four commercial events on the playground every year to meet the huge expenses of the club. He said therefore they rented out the playground for Tk 2 lakh to a private firm, which is selling possessions of the stalls.

"Everybody does it, look at Kalabagan Club they also do the same every year and these fairs are being held for decades," Babul said. "The private firm has agreed to pay an additional Tk 25,000 as reparation for the damage done to the field," he added.

Co-convenor of Dhanmondi Parishad Andolon, Salma Shafi, said a fair on the playground is 'absolutely unacceptable'. She said unable to find space for playing, many children in the area play on rooftops taking serious risks.

"Why should they use a designated playground for holding a fair, why don't they go to designated places for Baishakhi/Mela?" Shafi said.

Other residents alleged that the fair will also create a public nuisance in the area, which is already congested with vehicular traffic. A resident of Road no 8, opposite the playground, said requesting anonymity that all twenty families living in her apartment complex oppose such a fair in the residential area.

"During these events not only our children are deprived of playing facilities, but we also suffer as the roads become more congested, disrupting our movement," she said.

Judge Chunnu

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law ministry sent the letter to the Supreme Court for taking necessary steps.

A High Court bench, on February 13, issued an injunction on Chunnu, barring him from judicial activities for two weeks following a writ petition filed as public interest litigation by a Supreme Court lawyer, Khairul Alam, for Chunnu's alleged participation in political activities of ruling BNP.

The bench also issued a rule upon the government to show cause as to why it should not be asked to take action against Chunnu.

The High Court on February 26 extended the injunction for four weeks and for another six weeks on completion of it.

Khairul Alam submitted that Chunnu has been participating in BNP's public meetings at Kishoreganj where he introduced him as a candidate for the next parliamentary election from Kishoreganj Sadar constituency.

"He has been taking part in meetings of local BNP workers of Kishoreganj which is in clear violation of Government Servants (Conduct) Rules, 1979," the petitioner submitted.

Earlier on August 16 last year, Awami League leader Sharif Ahmed Sadi of Nague in Kishoreganj town, had served a legal notice to the government asking it to take appropriate action against Chunnu for his participation in political activities of BNP.

The Supreme Court Bar Association on August 3 demanded of the chief justice and the law ministry that they sack Chunnu from his post for his alleged participation in partisan politics.

On February 14, Chunnu filed an appeal with the Supreme Court seeking a stay on February 13 High Court order that imposed the injunction on him barring him from carrying out judicial functions.

After hearing, a four-member bench of the Appellate Division disregarded Chunnu's appeal on February 16.

BNP writes AL

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members to constitute the proposed committee to discuss the electoral reforms.

The 14-party opposition combine last night held an emergency meeting at the AL Dhanmondi office to decide the next course of action regarding the BNP letter.

Referring to the April 6 letter of AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil that labelled Jamaat as "communal" and patron of militancy, Bhuiyan in his letter said those remarks are "irrelevant" to the discussion.

The 14-party in its letter had suggested constituting the proposed committee with the BNP and AL leaders and leaving Jamaat.

On Jamaat's representation in the proposed committee, AL Acting General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said, "Our stance is clear... We are always against the forces of communalism and militancy."

The ruling BNP and Jamaat high-ups at a meeting on Monday with the prime minister decided that the BNP will not sit in a dialogue with the opposition over the reform proposals without Jamaat, a major partner of the ruling alliance.

The rigidity of both the parties on the planned dialogue on reforms in the caretaker government system and Election Commission has now rendered the dialogue itself uncertain.

Before sending the letter yesterday, Bhuiyan called Obaidul Quader over telephone and inquired about the health of Abdul Jalil, who is now in Singapore for treatment.

BNP's Office Secretary Mofiqul Hasan Tripti and Assistant Publicity Secretary Ahmed Musa handed

over the letter to Quader at AL President Sheikh Hasina's Dhanmondi office at 3:00pm.

At a press briefing at his residence Bhuiyan said he expects that the 14-party will respond to his letter and send names of their members soon. "Then we will start the discussion. We want to start the dialogue with an open mind," Bhuiyan told journalists.

On the AL's not willing to sit with any "war criminals" and "fundamentalist elements", Bhuiyan said, "I am hopeful that the dialogue will be held as the core subject for discussion is the electoral system... for a free and fair election. So, putting any condition about any political party will not be fair."

Meanwhile, the 14-party meeting last night decided not to sit in a dialogue with the anti-Liberation War forces and war criminals.

The meeting held after consulting with Hasina and chaired by AL Presidium member Tofail Ahmed decided to hold another meeting on 15 April and send a letter to the BNP giving the names of five AL leaders for the dialogue.

The AL leaders hoped that the BNP will also nominate its five leaders--trusted by its alliance partners--for the dialogue.

Saifur

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Australia, Indonesia, Cambodia and ESCAP executive secretary on matters of bilateral and regional interests.

The Finance Minister's delegation included Permanent Representative to ESCAP Ambassador Shahed Akhtar and Ambassador Nasim Ferdous.

Govt killing time

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cannot manipulate the next polls and change the results, she said.

The ruling alliance is conspiring to rig the polls as they know very well that people will not vote them to power again due to their widespread corruption and misrule, the AL chief said, adding that a free and fair election is not possible in an environment where the alliance government has politicised all the sectors.

She said a suitable environment for an impartial election has to be created through mass movement.

The opposition leader demanded international probe, preferably by the Interpol, into the militant activities in the country.

Hasina said the alliance government would have to answer to the nation about the militant outfits' patrons, financiers, trainers, and suppliers of arms and ammunition.

She held the coalition government responsible for the country-wide bomb blasts including the grenade attacks on an AL rally on August 21, 2004.

Referring to the prime minister's statement in the Time Magazine regarding militancy, the AL chief said, "If our prime minister did not know that there is militancy in the country, why she imposed ban on three Islamist outfits for involving with militancy?"

The former prime minister said the coalition government has appointed lobbyists in the USA spending public money for their

personal and political interest.

Blasting the four-party alliance government for large-scale corruption in every sector, Hasina urged the people to unite against the government's corruption, militancy, criminal activities, price hike of essentials, crisis of power, gas, fuel, fertiliser and other necessary commodities.

The AL president said 14 journalists were killed and around 2,500 tortured during the present government's tenure as the newsmen unveiled the large-scale corruption and misrule of the coalition government.

Hasina said a friendly environment would be created for the journalists if her party is voted to power.

Addressing the council, journalists from different parts of the country demanded freedom of the press and security of the journalists.

Presided over by BFUJ President Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, BFUJ Secretary General Manjurul Ahsan Bulbul, Dhaka Union of Journalists President Altaf Mahmud, Mostak Ahmed, Syed Abdul Latif, Sharat Kumar Bakshi, AHM Akhteruzzaman, Ataul Kabir Khokon, Mainul Haque and Akbarul Hasan Millat also spoke at the council.

ADP implementation

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resources (26 percent), housing and public works (27 percent), CHT affairs (31 percent), health and family welfare (32 percent), communications (34 percent), and environment and forest (35 percent).

The ministries performing above average include agriculture (58 percent), local government (56 percent), and primary and mass education (50 percent).

In FY05 the Tk 22,000 crore original ADP was downsized to Tk 20,500 crore, of which finally Tk 18,726 crore could be spent. In the same way, the current Tk 24,000 crore ADP might be trimmed to Tk 22,000 crore and finally about Tk 20,000 crore could be spent, sources reckoned.

They said, the ADP for the next fiscal year might be set at Tk 26,500 crore.

Tata still

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investment proposal.

Meanwhile, government negotiators ruled out signing of an agreement with Tata group on the basis of a low price of gas.

"We must not agree to a gas price which is less than the base price. They (Tata) must propose a price higher than \$2.35 per thousand cubic feet for further negotiation," a top negotiator said preferring anonymity.

Tata on April 20 last year formally submitted its investment proposal for setting up a 1,000 MW power plant, a steel mill with an annual production capacity of 4,20,000 tonnes and a fertiliser plant capable of producing one million tonnes a year.

On May 9, the group proposed to start formal negotiations on May 25 and end that by August 31 to clear the way for signing of the investment agreement by November 30 last year. But it had to review the time frame due to complications in the process.

BSF kills 1

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As they reached Tarail while returning home, the BSF men opened fire on them, leaving Zakir Hossain dead on the spot.

Confirming the incident, Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) official Major Asad said they were preparing to take measures in this regard.

BSS adds: Two groups of Indian Border Security Force (BSF) men illegally entered into Bangladesh territories in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat and Tetulia upazila of Panchagarh districts on Monday and Tuesday.

They tortured a Bangladeshi youth and damaged several houses, official sources said yesterday.

Five BSF men intruded into frontier Bangladeshi village Boraipara near Singhimari border in Hatibandha upazila of Lalmonirhat on Monday noon.

They created panic there and mercilessly beat up Bangladeshi citizen Ataur Rahman, 18, son of Mohammad Ali of the village before they left the spot.

BDR Commander of Singhimari Company immediately lodged strong protest with his counterpart Fulbari Company commander of BSF who sought apology from the BDR for the incident, sources said.

Eight to ten BSF men intruded into Narayonjyote near Tetulia border at 10:00am on Tuesday, BDR sources said.

The BSF men damaged four houses of the village and returned to India.

Two persons received bullet injuries yesterday morning as the BDR jawans opened fire on them when they tried to enter into Bangladeshi territory with smuggled Indian goods.

BDR said they arrested one of them, Anwar Hossain, a Bangladeshi citizen, and seized a huge amount of smuggled phensidyl and alcohol from his possession while the other managed to escape.

Ershad faces

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filed the writ petition in the High Court to realise the rest of the total amount of money fined by the Supreme Court against Ershad in the much-talked-about Janata Tower corruption case.

The same bench of the High Court appointed three senior lawyers -- former attorney generals Mahmud-ul Islam and AF Hasan Ariff, and advocate MA Malek -- as amicus-curies for more interpretation of the concerned laws regarding this case and also fixed April 4 for next hearing on the petition.

The hearing on the case was deferred, on April 4, for one week following filing of a time prayer by Ershad.

On June 7, 1993, the Additional District and Session Judge of Dhaka punished Ershad with seven years of imprisonment in the Janata Tower corruption case.

As Ershad had made an appeal against the verdict in the higher court, the High Court awarded him five years of imprisonment and a fine of Tk 54,870,800 as fixed by RAJUK calculated on the basis of the misappropriated money.

The Supreme Court in its judgment revised the High Court order reducing the imprisonment period to three years and six months.

Ershad suffered imprisonment of three years and three months, and paid Tk 27,435,400.

The Special Divisional Judge of Dhaka, on February 28, 2001, exempted Ershad from suffering the rest of three months of imprisonment and paying the remaining money.

The writ petition, filed by advocate MA Mannan on behalf of the Blast, also challenged the jurisdiction of the Special Divisional Judge of exempting Ershad from paying the total amount of the fine in the case.

Outlaw

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According to a Rab press release, the outlaw was arrested at midnight on Tuesday at Eastern Jute Mill area under Khanjahan Ali Police Station of the city.

Following his confessional statement, Rab members took him to Senhati Putbari Jarha Battala area at around 3:25am the same night to recover illegal arms. As soon as they reached the spot, the accomplices of Shahidul opened fire on them. The law enforcers retaliated triggering a 15-minute long firefight.

At one point, Shahidul got caught in the shootout while his accomplices fled. He died on the spot, says the press release.

Two guns, three cartridges, two bullets and a dagger were recovered from the spot.

Shahidul was an accused in 13 cases filed with the Digholia, Khalishpur and Khanjahan Ali police stations in Khulna and Ishwardi Police Station in Pabna, says the Rab press release.

He was the ringleader of a gang of robbers of the Sunderbans. Besides, he was involved in looting arms and ammunition from Shiromoni Cable factory in Khulna city in 1998 and from the storeroom of Daulatpur Jute Mills at Khalishpur in 2000.

Body of the slain outlaw was handed over to his family members yesterday afternoon.

Australia come back

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for 4 with captain Ricky Ponting batting on 72 and his deputy Adam Gilchrist, who restored Australia's pride avoiding follow-on with a face-saving 144 not out, on 6.

Australia will need 95 more runs on the fifth day with six wickets remaining to win the match on a pitch which has hardly cracked on the fourth day except offering sudden turn in the last hour.

After their first innings debacle Australia acclimatised quickly, batting their second essay with renewed confidence on the slow surface. Matthew Hayden and Mike Hussey (37) made a sensible start before the latter played on trying to sweep Enamul Haque with the score on 64-1.

The in form Ponting, who hit four hundreds in South Africa last month, then joined Hayden to frustrate the home side with a 109-run second wicket stand.

The partnership was broken when Hayden pushed Shahadat Hossain for a single but failed to complete his run following Enamul's direct hit from mid-on shattered his stumps. The mighty left-hander smashed a 152-ball 72 with eight fours and a six.

Rafique, however, brought Habibul Bashar's boys back in contention sending Damien Martyn (7) and Michael Clarke (9) back in quick succession as Australia slipped to 205 for 4 from 173 for 2.

But the day could have been much better for Bangladesh had they not showed their age-old second innings syndrome.

Resuming the day on 124-5, they lost their remaining half for 24 runs within 45 minutes of the day's play

be all out for 148 in 50 overs which gave them an overall lead of 306 runs.

After a forgettable first innings effort, champion leg-spinner Shane Warne clawed back securing three wickets while fast bowler Jason Gillespie, who gave the breakthrough in the second over removing Khaled Mashud for a duck, took the other wickets to fall on the day.

Earlier on the third day, dashing batsman Gilchrist took his overnight 51 runs to a well-placed 144, his 16th hundred, to defy Bangladesh a chance of enforcing a follow-on on the world's number one team.

The left-hander's 212-ball knock that produced 14 fours and six huge sixes helped Australia to score 269 all out in the first