

Demra turns

FROM PAGE 1
Dhaniabazar, Shanir Akhra, Kutubkhali, Dhalpur, Rayerbazar, Nayapara, Matuail, Shontek, Gobindapur, Nurpur and Paterbagh of Demra and Shyampur areas decided to put up barricades on the highway yesterday morning.

Announcement was made on loudspeakers from different mosques in the areas Thursday night and yesterday morning, urging the residents to join the agitation programme.

Hundreds of vehicles got stuck as people from different walks of life blocked both sides of the highway at Shanir Akhra at 6:30am.

Witnesses said the demonstration had been absolutely peaceful until Salahuddin's imprudent interference at 10:15am.

Salahuddin first asked the demonstrators to withdraw the blockades. He slapped an elderly man as he protested the lawmaker's way of talking. A few of the angry people at this point hurled brickbats at Salahuddin.

The MP and his bodyguard pulled out their firearms and fired some five blank shots to scare away the mob, people said.

They said Salahuddin asked Officer-in-Charge of the local police station Abdul Gaffar to open fire on the demonstrators.

"Salahuddin asked the police to open fire, saying the people will automatically leave the road if two or three die," Hanif, a rickshawpuller from Merajbagh who was standing beside the MP at that time, told The Daily Star.

The police, however, did not comply with the orders.

The angry demonstrators threw brickbats at the MP and chased him. Salahuddin took shelter first inside Anarkoli Fast Food and Confectionery, about 100 yards away, and then Popi General Hospital.

Around 500 policemen chased the agitating mob but they gathered again and counter-chased the law enforcers.

By the time Salahuddin managed to flee the scene, a number of activists of JCD, ruling BNP's student wing, joined the police to attack the angry crowd.

After two hours of chasing-counter chasing, the law enforcers left Shanir Akhra around noon and took position near the Jatrabari foot over-bridge.

The mob took control of the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway and damaged over 150 vehicles including a police van. They also vandalised the Shanir Akhra police outpost and a filling station and tried to set it on fire.

They also destroyed a godown containing materials for the construction of a small flyover along the Dhaka-Chittagong Highway. Locals alleged that Salahuddin's son Imran Ahmed got the contract for constructing the flyover three years ago but has not yet finished the work.

Army men led by Brigadier General Nizam Ahmed arrived in the area with 10 lorries of water at 4:15pm.

Several contingents of police fired teargas shells to disperse the

mob to make way for the army but people chased the police away. The army men tried to pacify the mob but failed. Three military officials—Abdur Rab, Zia and Kabir—were wounded as the demonstrators threw brickbats at them.

The police and the army withdrew half an hour later.

Meanwhile, as vehicular movement on the highway came to a stop, the police diverted vehicles from Demra towards Jatrabari. But it took the vehicles long hours to cross the area due to clogging on the narrow road.

Locals burnt several effigies of Salahuddin during their demonstration.

LOCALS' DEMANDS

In the evening, the locals announced on loudspeakers that they would not withdraw until their seven-point demand is fulfilled.

The demands include solution to water and power crises, repairing of the Shanir Akhra water pump, finishing the construction of a foot over-bridge at the Shanir Akhra bus stand immediately, demolishing illegal establishments, including the godown, on both sides of the highway, unconditional apology of Salahuddin, and assurance that no case would be filed against them.

At 6:15pm, around 250 JCD cadres with sticks suddenly swooped on the demonstrators and chased them away from Shanir Akhra. Gathered again, the demonstrators chased the JCD men away although could not keep control of the area.

The JCD activists were chanting slogans against the "troublemakers", threatening of dire consequences if anything happened to Salahuddin.

The duty officer at Demra Police Station said yesterday evening that 13-14 policemen were injured during the clashes. She said all of them were undergoing treatment at Rajarbagh Police Lines Hospital.

Talking to The Daily Star, many locals said they have been undergoing untold sufferings for the last three months for lack of adequate water and power supply.

"We get water for a few minutes in the morning and in the night and it is too scanty to meet the household needs," said Mohammad Ali, a leader of the agitating Sangram Parishad.

Expressing disgust over water and power crises, government employee Amjad Hossain of Rayerbagh said they cannot cope with the situation. "My son whose HSC examination begins May 14 cannot study properly for frequent power outages. Electricity is supplied for only a few hours a day," he said.

Many said they have not bathed for three to four days due to water crisis.

"We cannot even sleep at night for load-shedding," Monir Hossain, a grocer from Baganbari, complained.

MP Salahuddin

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for his 'misconduct' with the demonstrators, told reporters at his Kadamtola house after yesterday morning's police action at Shanir Akhra.

Yesterday's agitation was not any outburst of common people's grief, he said.

Refuting the news of firing shots from his pistol, he said, "I did not have any firearm." He also denied his bodyguard's opening fire.

Asked about his steps to solve the problem, he said he did not know the problem was so acute.

"Getting the news of the agitation, I rushed there and told them I would arrange water by tomorrow and the convinced people left the place. But when I was leaving, somebody hurled brickbats at me. Criminals of Awami League attacked me according to a previous plan."

"They have attacked me!" the MP from Demra-Shyampur expressed surprise, adding, "General people of my constituency cannot do this because I love them and I am a friend of them."

Admitting water crisis in the area, Salahuddin said the area is outside the city corporation and the army has been tasked with distribution of water there.

Palli Bidyut

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building and stormed into it ransacking office furniture around 8:00pm.

Swapan Kumar Halder, who was on duty at the office, said he and three other employees were injured during the mob-attack.

Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Tighter security measures have been taken to prevent further untoward incidents.

Local leaders of Awami League and BNP alleged people of Batiaghata upazila are fed up with frequent power cuts. The entire upazila has been virtually in darkness during the nights for a month, they added.

Local businessmen had been complaining about the power cuts to the authorities concerned but Palli Bidyut failed to resolve the issue.

Target terrorism

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discuss what else can be done to strengthen the regional cooperation.

The general meeting agenda will include extradition of Bangladeshi criminals hiding in other Saarc countries, Babar said.

"We'll discuss issues of common interests during the bilateral meetings," he said. The schedule for the bilateral meetings is yet to be fixed.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia signed Agreement for Mutual Cooperation for Preventing Illicit Trafficking in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and Related Matters during her state visit to India from March 20-22 this year.

Condemning terrorist violence in all forms and manifestations, the Saarc member states called for effective mechanism for implementation of the Saarc Convention on Suppression of Terrorism during the 13th Saarc Summit that ended on November 13 in Dhaka.

The Saarc leaders also decided to strengthen cooperation in exchanging information among their relevant agencies and hold meeting of home ministers annually.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will inaugurate the Saarc home ministers' meeting at Winter Garden of Dhaka Sheraton Hotel and the working session will be held later at the Ballroom of the hotel.

The meeting of the home secretaries and police chiefs will be held at Chameli of the hotel.

Talk directly

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"When you are in that sort of a mood, given their own culture, you probably don't put everything on the table," Annan said.

He said the Iranians could soon find themselves in a difficult situation after assuring the world they were not seeking nuclear weapons.

Should they be offered a diplomatic package allowing them to pursue nuclear energy for peaceful ends "and they resist that, how do they explain it to the world?" he asked.

In fresh defiance, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad vowed yesterday that Iran would pursue its contested nuclear programme until it could mass-produce atomic fuel, and branded those trying to stop it as "bullies."

"We intend to continue our activity... until we manage industrial-scale production of nuclear fuel for our atomic power stations," Ahmadinejad said, according to a text of his speech at a regional summit in Azerbaijan.

The Iranian president's comments in the Azeri capital Baku came as Western powers, which fear Tehran is concealing a drive for atomic weapons, push for a tough UN resolution requiring it to halt uranium enrichment or face possible sanctions.

Ahmadijad told leaders from the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) -- which includes five of Iran's neighbours -- that "certain bullies are insolently trying to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries."

The speech was made behind closed doors, but a copy of the text was obtained by AFP.

Ahmadijad hailed his country's nuclear power drive as "a great achievement for the whole region and the Islamic world."

Fatality rate 50 times

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recorded by the cell in six years that killed some 17,825 people and injured more than 20,000 others.

Of the accidents, contrary to the general perception, about 60 per cent took place in rural areas. The rural accidents are also more disastrous than their urban counterparts and account for almost two-thirds of the country's total road traffic fatalities, reports the ARC.

According to it, nearly 37 per cent of the road accidents take place on national highways, 12 per cent in regional roads and 15 per cent in feeder roads.

Buses account for 48 per cent and trucks 37 per cent of the vehicles suffering accidents. These two are the main contributors to road mishaps.

Forty-four per cent of the accidents involve pedestrians, followed by 16.5 per cent rear-end and 13.2 per cent head-on accidents, the ARC reports.

Pedestrians also represent as much as 53 per cent of the dead in road accidents. In urban areas, they often constitute up to 70 per cent of the fatalities.

Nearly 21 per cent of the dead are aged below 16. The percentage is nearly 2.5 times higher than that of the developed countries, according to the ARC.

The ARC director, Mazhar, names reckless driving, over-speeding, overloading, ignorance of road users, vehicular defects, hazardous roads and road environments, inadequate training, and poor enforcement of traffic rules and regulations as the main causes of road accidents.

RIVER DISASTERS

As in road transportation, the country's inland water transport too suffer from high frequency of accidents and casualties. On the other hand, the lack of monitoring, reporting and recording is more acute in case of river mishaps.

The shipping ministry claims only 385 river accidents took place in 1976 to 2006, claiming 3,597 lives, with 396 people critically wounded and 252 others remaining missing.

But, every quarter concerned knows the real picture is grimmer by many degrees. Because, while the Inland Shipping Ordinance of 1976 empowers only the vessel crew to file case about an accident or report it to the police, in most cases, the crew rather flees the spot as soon as possible.

Despite a series of launch disasters in the recent years, faulty vessels continue plying the river routes, threatening with yet another round of disasters in the coming monsoon. The owners of some vessels, which were declared unfit, are plying them after changing their colours and names.

But officials of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) argue they do not have enough manpower to inspect all the vessels. The BIWTA has just nine inspectors for nearly 8,000 passenger vessels plying

in the country, sources say. Of them three inspectors are posted at Sadarghat in the capital and one each of the rest in Narayanganj, Chandpur, Aritaha, Barisal, Khulna and Patuakhali.

Moreover, BIWTA sources say, most of the masters or pilots of the passenger vessels do not have proper training and licences. Experts say violation of rules is the main cause of launch accidents. But the rule violators are rarely brought to book.

Hundreds of cases are pending with the marine court, officials tell The Daily Star. "Cases lodged back in 1988 are also among those awaiting disposal," says one of them.

RAILWAY SCENE
With half of the country's railway tracks being run-down and unsafe, every year the railway sector sees over 500 accidents on average. But the causality rate is not as high in this sector as in road and water transports.

A total of 354 people were killed and 2,485 injured in 4,968 train accidents in the decade from 1995-96 to 2004-05.

Amazingly, despite the dilapidation of rail tracks, which is the main reason of so many accidents, the railway department does not allocate any fund for repairs and maintenance of the tracks in its annual budget. The department is keener to buy new locomotives than repairing the unsafe tracks.

Saifur

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investigations on him," a doctor attending on him at Yashoda Hospital said.

A decision on the course of treatment would be taken on the basis of the results of the diagnostic tests, the doctor added.

Rahman is in incentive care unit (ICU) and his health condition is being monitored closely.

Andhra Pradesh Information and Public Relations Minister Mohammad Ali Shabbir visited Yashoda Hospital, where Rahman was admitted, and consulted the doctors, hospital sources said.

Meanwhile, Kaiser Rahman, Saifur's son in Dhaka told The Daily Star that his father, who had been suffering from urinary tract infection, had dehydration due to the excessive heat and became ill for extensive works from May 2 to 5.

Quoting the doctors at Hyderabad, Kaiser said Saifur was kept under observation and would be released this morning.

2 shot

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criminals sprayed bullets at him. They missed him as he rushed into the office but the guards on duty were hit.

"The extortionists had been demanding toll over telephone. The numbers of all the phone calls showed they were made from overseas countries," he added.

The extortionists did not say anything about when and where the money is to be given, said Noor adding he had filed a case with Gulshan Police Station on Thursday night. A general diary was also filed 25 days ago in this connection.

The owner of the agency Shahjahan Mohammad Chowdhury, who lives in Saudi Arabia, also received demands for toll and threats by unknown criminals. His wife lodged a general diary with Uttara Police Station on Thursday night, the agency official said.

Bangla Bhai

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accused were involved with the December 8 bomb blast in front of Netrakona Udichi office in the district town where eight persons were killed and over 50 others were injured.

Local elites, leaders of different political parties and residents of the town protested the dropping of Abdur Rahman's name from the charge sheet.

50 hurt

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The strike was jointly called by bus-minibus-truck owners and workers associations of 21 districts of south-western region to press home their demands, including cancellation of BRTC bus services on all routes of these districts.

This decision to call off the strike from 15 districts and to continue in six others was taken at an emergency meeting of leaders of the transport owners associations at Sonadanga Bus Terminal in Khulna city.

Chaired by Khulna Inter-district Bus and Minibus Workers Association President Abdul Gaffar Biswas, the meeting also demanded stoppage of plying of Nasim, Karim and other modes of vehicles on these routes.

Awami League lawmaker Shajahan Khan, also the executive president of Bangladesh Road Transport Federation was present in the meeting as chief guest.

Shajahan Khan said the decision to continue strike in six districts has been taken as government has turned a deaf ear to their demands despite call for an indefinite strike in 21 districts from May 2.

Shajahan Khan alleged the communications minister is yet to sit with them for resolving the dispute.

"We again will call for strike for an indefinite period in all the 21 districts if our demands are not met soon," he said.

Present job

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psychiatry and 4 specialists on aerospace medicine.

"At least 12 years are needed to make an officer a specialist on any particular subject. But now there is no significant move for specialisation of the officers," a senior officer said.

The percentage of commissioning officers into AMC in respect to its demand have been decreasing each year over the last six years since January 2000, sources said.

Only 28 officers were commissioned into AMC in two batches in 2000 against a demand for 50 officers. In 2001, 37 officers were commissioned in two batches against a demand for 58 officers. In 2002, 47 officers were commissioned in two batches against a demand for 78 officers. In 2003, 27 officers were commissioned in two batches against a demand for 40. In 2004, 12 officers were commissioned in two batches against a demand for 50 and in 2005 only three officers were commissioned into AMC against a demand for 50 officers.

Sources said against a demand for 50 officers, only 21 joined training in the first batch in January 2006 and they are expected to get commissions next September. "But we don't know how many will remain finally," a senior officer said.

Merry ride

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agitators chased a truck, the driver revved up the engine and steered the vehicle into an alleyway. But soon he lost control and rammed the rickshaw that was carrying Meemusa, her mother Shaheen Akhter and grandmother.

A class II student of Govindapur High School at city's Shanir Akhra, Meemusa fell on the road and the truck ran over her.

She was rushed to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) but only to be declared dead on arrival, said Meemusa's father.

Abbas calls Israeli PM to resume peace talks

AP, Jerusalem

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas phoned Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert yesterday and urged him to resume peace talks quickly now that his government has assumed power.

Olmert's aides said a meeting with the moderate Abbas is possible, but ruled out negotiations as long as the Hamas-led Palestinian Authority refuses to recognise Israel or renounce violence.

With the Islamic militant Hamas refusing to budge, a speedy resumption of talks that broke down in 2000 appears unlikely.

Olmert reiterated Thursday, after his government was approved by parliament, that he is determined to set Israel's final borders even without negotiations, and that this would entail the dismantling of smaller Jewish settlements scattered across the West Bank. Olmert has said he intends to hold on to large settlements as part of his "consolidation" plan. "Partitioning the land is a lifeline for Zionism," he told parliament Thursday.

Olmert was to meet with U.S. leaders in Washington later this month to try to win backing for his West Bank plan. He has said he would not proceed without broad international support. U.S. officials have said final borders between Israel and a Palestinian state must be drawn in peace talks, but have not rejected

Olmert's ideas outright.

Abbas called Olmert on Friday and urged him to resume negotiations, said Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat.

"President Abbas called Mr. Olmert, congratulated him on the formation of the new Cabinet and offered to resume the partnership between the two sides and to resume negotiations," said Erekat. Olmert told Abbas he would consider a meeting after his Washington trip, Erekat said, adding that no date has been set.

Israeli Cabinet Secretary Israel Maimon said a meeting with Abbas was possible, but that negotiations can only resume if Hamas moderates its positions. "As long as there is terror and as long as the terms (for moderation) are not being fulfilled, there cannot be talk about negotiations," Maimon told Israel Radio.

Abbas, elected separately, has been wrangling with the Hamas government over the division of powers, particularly over control of the security forces. At the same time, he has appealed to the West to restore aid payments to the Palestinians, frozen after the Hamas government took office in late March, two months after its election victory.

Business leaders

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announced the name of the Enterprise of the Year and handed over the award to Md Mazbar Rahman, chairman of the BRB Cable Industries Ltd, at a gala ceremony in the Sonargaon Hotel ballroom following a fascinating laser show.

Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), announced the name of the Outstanding Woman in Business of the Year 2005 and handed over the award to Hasina Newaz.

Scott Price, chief executive officer of DHL Express, Asia Pacific, announced the name of the recipient of Special Achievement Award 2005 and handed it over to Kihak Sung, chairman of Youngone group.

Finally, Salehuddin Ahmed, governor of Bangladesh Bank, announced the name of the Business Person of the Year 2005 and handed the award to Fazlur Rahman.

Diplomats, business leaders, entrepreneurs, intellectuals, professionals and government officials attended the event.

Following the announcement of the names of award winners one by one amid pin-drop silence, the audience burst into applause congratulating the business heroes. Two giant screens displayed their exemplary successes in brief.

Receiving the Enterprise of the Year 2005 Award on behalf of BRB Cable Industries Ltd, Mazbar Rahman said producing quality products is the key to success.

"Being an entrepreneur, I do all these not only for myself. Industries create jobs and at the end benefit people," he said.

Expressing her reaction to winning the Outstanding Woman in Business of the Year 2005 Award, Hasina Newaz elaborating on the start of her business said it is possible to start a business with a small capital.

"But sincerity is the key to success. I had to overcome financial limitations and social problems to become a woman entrepreneur," she told the gala event.

After receiving the Special Achievement Award on behalf of Youngone group, Kihak Sung said Youngone is a Bangladeshi company and it carries 'Made in Bangladesh' on the global market.

He said Youngone wants Bangladesh to take a step forward in the industrial sector.

Fazlur Rahman, who was awarded the Business Person of the Year 2005,

said willingness, commitment and quality products are the keys to his success in business.

Earlier, Editor and Publisher of The Daily Star Mahfuz Anam observed that it is a tremendous success of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs that they made their presence in the global market despite facing severe obstacles and limitations at home.

It was told that thousands of garment workers would lose jobs after phasing out of quota in the US market from 2005 but it is the entrepreneurs who have successfully overcome it, he said.

Scott Price said Bangladesh is a growing country and increasingly making its presence stronger in the industrial sector and the readymade garment sector is one of them.

Hard work and persistence are key in the business, he observed adding that the achievements of the business leaders benefit the community.

Speaking at the event, Salehuddin Ahmed said Bangladesh is now growing at six percent rate and the credit for this goes to the business entrepreneurs, as they are the driving force behind it despite facing many problems.

In his concluding remarks, Desmond Quiah, country manager of DHL Worldwide Express, Bangladesh, said the awards are recognition of the contributions of Bangladeshi entrepreneurs as they are usually not recognised properly.

BSF kills 1

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the Mahananda river at about 5:00am.

Komirul died on the spot while Ismail received bullet in his left hand.

The BSF men took away the body to their camp. Ismail, however, managed to flee and is now undergoing treatment at Panchagarh Sadar Hospital.

BDR sent a letter to its Indian counterpart protesting the killing and asking for a flag meeting. The Indian side did not respond as of 5:30 pm yesterday.

A tense situation is prevailing in the border area following the incident.

Blair dumps ministers

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lower house of parliament. Defence minister John Reid will take over from Clarke, who has been accused of incompetence after foreign prisoners were released without checks.

"Margaret Beckett going to the Foreign Office was certainly not something anyone had predicted. Reid is a marvellous all round player for Tony Blair and here he is saving his bacon again," Page told Reuters.

Thursday's vote was held in 176 of the 389 local authorities in England, with 4,360 council seats up for grabs.

Results on a BBC Web Site showed Labour had lost 256 of the 1,768 seats it was defending, while a resurgent opposition Conservative party under new leader David Cameron gained 252.

"This is a warning shot for us as a government," said finance minister Gordon Brown ahead of the reshuffle. "The renewal of the Labour Party must start now."

"This was a massive shot for us as a government," said finance minister Gordon Brown ahead of the reshuffle. "The renewal of the Labour Party must start now."

Brown, who has been finance minister ever since Labour returned to power in 1997, has long coveted Blair's job. He is widely expected to take over before the next general election, due by mid-2010 at the latest.

Relations between the two have been tense, although they campaigned together for the local elections and Brown said on Friday that Blair and Labour wanted an orderly transition.

Blair, who won his third straight election in 2005, has said he will quit before the next election, but has not set a date.

Critics have attacked the prime

16,000 species

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lives and livelihoods of billions of people who depend on them are far-reaching."

The Red List classifies about 40,000 species according to their risk of extinction and provides a searchable online database of the results. The total number of species on the planet is unknown, with 15 million being the most widely accepted estimate. Up to 1.8 million are known today.

People are the main reason for most species' decline, mainly through habitat destruction, according to IUCN.

Polar bears are