

Ahmadiyyas relieved

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The area where tension was running high since an anti-Ahmadiyya rally there last Thursday.

Earlier, the zealots staged a rally provoking hatred against the beliefs of the Ahmadiyyas under the banner of 'Ittefaqu Ulama'.

After the rally, the fanatics attacked the house of an Ahmadiyya sect believer Shamsuddin Master, assistant headmaster of Mesta High School. They forcibly snatched the teacher's cattle, threatened eight other Ahmadiyya families of attacks and abduction and instructed them not to get out of their houses.

Provoked by the local anti-Ahmadiyya leaders' instigating speeches, locals also enforced incarceration on the Ahmadiyyas and stopped conducting any trade of necessary commodities with the Ahmadiyyas.

Panicked Ahmadiyya children were forced to stop going to their educational institutes while the adults were barred from going to offices or looking after their agricultural farms.

After an appeal from the Ahmadiyya families and leaders of different human rights organisations, the local administration convened the meeting of Ahmadiyyas and the anti-Ahmadiyya outfit.

Six anti-Ahmadiyya leaders including key organisers Nurul Huda Abedi, who is also the principal of Sharishabari Aliya Madrasa and brother-in-law of Jama'atul

Mujahideen Bangladesh chief Abdur Rahman, Imam of local mosques Nurul Islam Dudu and Habibur Rahman Faruqi were present at the meeting.

Sharishabari Municipality Chairman Faridul Kabir Talukder came down heavily on the anti-Ahmadiyya leaders for their hate campaign against the Ahmadiyyas and asked them to stop the torment immediately.

"No-one will be spared if he attacks on followers of any sect of Islam and members of other religion here from now on," the municipality chairman said during the meeting.

Local ward commissioner and officer-in-charge of Sharishabari Police Station were also present at the meeting.

The anti-Ahmadiyya outfit leaders promised that their men would refrain from any further attack on the Ahmadiyyas.

5 cops injured

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while seven were thrown into water by the smugglers.

The firearms were believed to be manufactured in a clandestine arms factory at Maheshkhali offshore island of the Bay.

Police arrested suspected members of the racket - Abdul Gafur, Rokeya Begum, Abdul Hakim and Nurul Hakim - all hailed from Baro Maheshkhali village at Maheshkhali.

BSP, Noab urge

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industry, the role of media and certain political issues.

The editors of the newspapers underlined the importance of media as the fourth estate of a country. They said they have been highlighting their stand against hartal and destruction in the press.

While discussing the issue of general elections, the members of BSP and Noab underlined the need for holding free and neutral general elections in the country.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia said the government has always been favouring free and fair general elections in the country to strengthen democracy.

Seeking cooperation from all quarters for holding free and fair polls, Khaleda said the door for dialogue is still open. She expressed her optimism that the main opposition will participate in the dialogue.

The editors of newspapers said the elections must be held on time for continuing the democratic process and further strengthening the democratic system in the country.

They also urged Khaleda to take steps to save the rivers like Buriganga and Turag.

Reiterating her stand on saving the rivers, Khaleda said the government has taken several steps to save the rivers. In this regard, she sought cooperation of all concerned including the civil society.

Information Minister M Shamsul Islam and Deputy Minister for Information Abdus Salam Pintoo were also present during the talks.

Muhuri murder case

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Zahurul Haq and Tofazzal Ahmed died.

The HC judgement said evidence given by the complainant, confession of Montu, recovery of arms used in the murder, report of arms experts, past records of the accused and circumstantial evidence clearly proved the guilt of the convicts.

Principal Gopal Krishna Muhuri of Nazirhat College in Chittagong was killed at his Jamal Khan Road residence on November 16, 2001.

Three gunmen accompanied by an unnamed criminal broke into his house, dragged him to the drawing room from his bedroom and shot him in his head.

The gruesome killing of an educationist only 35 days after the BNP-Jamaat coalition came to power shocked the nation profoundly.

Following the case filed by Muhuri's wife Uma Muhuri, police chargesheeted 12 people as accused.

Chittagong Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal heard the case and gave its verdict on February 6, 2003.

The HC hearing of the death reference began on July 5 and delivery of the verdict started on July 17.

On the confessional statement of condemned convict Taslim Uddin Montu, the HC bench observed that if

someone is not involved in a killing, it is not possible for one to give a detailed account of the incident through confession. Besides, Montu's confession is self-motivated and true. The convict could not prove that he made the confession due to torture.

The court said Montu had submitted a petition for withdrawing his confessional statement. But did not do this in accordance with law and had made a long delay not permitted by law.

The HC expressed its surprise over the role of the public prosecutor (PP) who conducted the case at the speedy trial tribunal. The PP did not take any initiative to identify the guilty persons though there was scope to identify them with the help of the complainant, witnesses and others.

Regarding the role of the investigating officers of the case, the court noted that there were four officials in charge of the investigation yet the probe was shabbily done.

On behalf of Uma Muhuri, Advocate AKM Faiz and Advocate Hari Sadhan Dev Brahmam moved the case at HC. Advocate Ajay Bhomik, DL Chowdhury and Abdul Malek assisted them.

EC, finance

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Saifur told reporters. "It is people's money, the tax payers' money, and it is my constitutional duty to see if the money is being spent properly," he said.

"We will examine the accounts of the previous expenditure and then decide about further allocation," he added.

Meanwhile, the finance minister's refusal has created new trouble for the EC, hampering the preparatory work prior to the updating task as the assistant officers expressed doubts over the success of the whole process.

The field level election officials said it would be difficult for them to begin the task by visiting door to door from Friday properly as the finance minister's refusal has made the situation "very adverse".

Talking to reporters about the latest situation, Secretary to the EC Secretariat Abdur Rashid Sarkar said if anybody creates any obstacle to discharging the EC's constitutional duties, he will be responsible for the consequences.

"We hope the finance ministry will grant money for the sake of people and the nation," he said.

Asked if the EC Secretariat will communicate with the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for the budget as the finance minister had suggested, Abdur Rashid said the situation does not still require any such move.

The secretary said the finance ministry has not yet informed them in written of its decision over the proposed budget.

Abdur Rashid had earlier said they will prepare the budget after completing recruitments of the assistant officers by July 20. But the secretariat sent the proposal for

budgetary allocation to the finance ministry on July 17.

The two or three senior officials of the EC Secretariat involved in preparing the budget maintained silence about the amount of the budget while others kept guessing it to be around Tk 40 crore.

CONFUSION GRIPS PREPARATORY WORK

District election officers appointed as registration officers and assistant registration officers are facing new difficulties following the finance minister's refusal.

"We are preparing to begin the task for updating the voter list from Friday, but the latest development has put the task in uncertainty," a district election officer said.

The EC Secretariat, however, has assured the field level election officials of providing them with fund by next week, sources said.

But the finance minister's refusal gave hints that the allocation will be delayed, a district election officer argued.

"The assistant officers recruited for updating the voter list are expressing doubts over the success of the new move for updating the voter list," said another district election officer.

The EC began updating the voter list sitting at the election offices from July 1 but failed to get people's response. On July 7, it decided to visit door to door to do the task.

ON DEMAND OF NAGORIC COMMITTEE

On Nagoric Committee's demand for the resignation of the CEC and two election commissioners, Aziz did not say anything directly. "Many have said many things on the civil society, I don't want to say anything," he said.

Tsunami body count

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can be sure that won't be a new tsunami," bin Umri said. "People are still traumatised. That's why they ran to higher ground in panic when they heard the rumours."

At least 525 people were killed by Monday's waves, the National Disaster Management Coordinating Agency said, while 273 people were still missing. About 38,000 people have been displaced, it said.

At least six foreigners were believed among the dead. Aid meanwhile trickled through as a haphazard relief operation took shape.

The UN's World Food Programme said two trucks carrying 15 tonnes of noodles and high-energy biscuits had arrived in Pangandaran and begun unloading.

"We're trying to reach around 20,000 people in the next week," spokesman Barry Came told AFP, adding that a team of WFP staff were leaving Wednesday for the area to "figure out exactly what to do."

Relief coordinator Subur Dwiyoano told the Detik.com online news agency that the local government had received food and cash aid.

"So far we have received 650 million rupiah (71,000 dollars) in cash. The plan is to distribute the cash to relatives of dead victims," he said. He did not say how much each family would receive.

He said 10 public kitchens had also been set up in Pangandaran.

One truck carrying a tonne of food supplies donated by President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono's wife arrived in the battered resort area.

Eight trucks filled mostly with mineral water also arrived in the district of Cilacap, where more than 100 lives were lost.

A district official Sugiono said three large military tents and two public kitchens had been set up while four rubber boats were deployed to help in the search for the missing.

"There's still confusion about what to do. The main priority is to save lives," he told AFP.

In Kebumen district, authorities dispatched rice and noodles to safe shelters where refugees were too afraid to return to the coast.

"When people began to shout: 'Tsunami, tsunami!', all I could think of was to run for my life," said Sudamin, a 48-year-old coconut farmer from Aye, a small village in the district, who was at a shelter.

The Asian Development Bank said it was ready to provide support to Indonesia Wednesday while Britain also offered assistance.

ANOTHER UNDERSEA

Syndicate

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"So we are going to take a number of stronger measures to tackle price hikes during the upcoming holy month of Ramadan," the minister said.

He informed about the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh's (TCB) plans to import commodities that usually suffer price hikes during Ramadan.

"I think the government should import some essential commodities to help bring the prices down," the minister added.

Hafizuddin said all necessary steps would be taken soon to help bring down the price of essential commodities to a bearable level.

"We are going to formulate a tough law against the hoarders in parliament soon," he said.

"Government should enact the consumer protection act soon, otherwise the controlling power of the syndicates will remain," said Golam Mawla, general secretary of Moulvibazar Baboshayee Samity, while talking to The Daily Star after the meeting.

The price of sugar will not increase any further if the government imported sugar with its own mechanism, said a sugar trader.

He said when the government let private firms import sugar, the sugar prices increased from Tk 20 to Tk 35 per Kg.

Traders feared the edible oil price would increase soon if the government did not import edible oil through its own mechanism.

Feroz Ahmed, secretary to the commerce ministry and Mir Nasir Hossain, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) were present among others in the meeting.

Shibir planned

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highly secured den for their strategy planning inside a building adjacent to the university from where Islamic books are supposedly published. Adhunik Press is the name of this publishing press.

Access to the top floor of the building is highly restricted for common people.

ICS is also known to be exploiting the mosques to hold their political meetings.

A number of Shibir workers have infiltrated in Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) to serve the purpose of their master plan, sources said.

BCL and JCD leaders admitted this situation.

Shibir amassed around 300 workers from all around the country who joined their existing 200 university unit workers on Monday before clashes with BCL and JCD, sources said.

ICS leaders and workers gathered on campus from Rajshahi University, Chittagong University, Islamic University, Dhaka Alia Madrasa and from different areas of old Dhaka to strengthen their compatriots in Jagannath University.

Vice-chancellor Prof Sirajul Islam Khan admitted that there might be a number of teachers who patronise Shibir. Accusations on some teachers also have been brought to his attention, he added.

Different democratic student fronts vowed to resist political parties like ICS that use religious fanaticism as their tool.

Kamrul Hasan Ripon, President of the university unit of BCL, said no extremist organisation would be tolerated here to conduct their activities.

Biotech policy

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human being, animal or plant, he added.

The policy also emphasised protecting indigenous community knowledge, collective innovations and community rights.

For ensuring those, the Community Knowledge Protection Act will be enacted to give guidelines, where it is necessary, to innovations of any form that have used natural and biological resources.

Immediate action programmes will also be taken for the development of biotechnology in the country in various sectors like agriculture, health, industry and environment. The programmes will reflect the urgent national needs and requirements in terms of funding manpower and equipment.

An international biotechnology advisory committee will be formed with internationally recognised experts in different areas of biotechnology to advise the government on priority areas of research and development.

Besides, the science and ICT ministry will develop a priority plan in different areas of biotechnology to keep pace with the fast advancing field of biotechnology and genetic engineering for poverty alleviation, sustainable development improvement of quality of life and biodiversity conservation.

The new policy will encourage the universities to introduce and strengthen biotechnology and genetic engineering at the undergraduate and post graduate levels. At the same time the biotechnological courses will be introduced at the secondary and higher secondary levels through modification of existing course curricula on biology.

Young graduates will be encouraged for undertaking higher academic studies in advanced universities abroad.

The policy draft says in biotechnology research, problem arises concerning the protection of intellectual property for innovations in this field beyond legal and ethical questions. In view of the special quality of living organisms the scope of patents has to be clearly defined to find balance between innovation and public interest.

Under the policy, legal measures will be taken to achieve a balanced system for protecting the interest of the innovation without compromising public interest.

Life-saving drugs

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the trade name Eltroxyn, sells at Rs 75 in India, and not more than baht. 170 in Thailand. If converted to taka, the prices will be more than Tk 150 and Tk 250 respectively.

"I don't understand why the price is so high here when the drug industry is booming in our country," said Azizur Rashid who needs to buy the Oroxyn on a regular basis.

Some drugs like Doxorubicin are not available in the market for some days. The price of that medicine shot up to Tk 3,000 from usual Tk 1,400 before going out of the market, said a pharmacist at Shahbagh yesterday.

In some cases, the importing pharmaceutical companies sell the life-saving drugs on condition that the pharmacies will have to buy also the items that do not sell much.

"In such cases, we have no alternative but to up the prices of the main products," said a medicine trader.

Sources at the Druggists and

Chemists Association said the directorate of drug control does not control the prices of imported drugs and it leads to growing smuggling of drugs.

"Prices of smuggled medicines are low. But buying those could prove dangerous as often they are not preserved following proper maintenance procedures," said Anwar, from Lazz Pharma Ltd.

Besides, higher prices of imported medicines encourage the sale of counterfeit drugs on the local market.

On numerous occasions, the drug testing laboratory has identified spurious makes of different drugs.

When asked about the increased prices of medicines, Rafiq Hossain a relative of a cancer patient, said, "It does not cause me to raise an eyebrow. The government does nothing to contain the prices of essential food items, let alone control the prices of medicines."

55 killed in Lebanon

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Wednesday, with 21 of the 54 killed in a single village where residents said 10 houses were destroyed.

Israel also continued its deadly offensive in the Gaza Strip which is aimed at retrieving another soldier held captive by Palestinian militants, killing seven people in raids on Wednesday, bringing to 93 the number killed since it launched an operation to retrieve a captive soldier and halt rocket attacks.

Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, who took office about a year ago after the first elections since former powerbroker Syria ended its three-decade military presence, accused Israel of "committing massacres" against his people.

"The intensifying aggression in this barbaric way proves that Israel has decided to push Lebanon back 50 years."

But Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert defended the relentless bombardment, saying it was aimed at obtaining the release of the two Israeli soldiers and the disarmament of Hezbollah in line with an existing UN resolution.

Across the border in northern Israel, a civilian was killed Tuesday when a rocket hit a park in the resort of Nahariya in the latest of hundreds of rocket attacks by Hezbollah.

Over the past week 25 Israelis have been killed, most in a barrage of Hezbollah rocket fire across the border, including 12 soldiers. Another eight rockets exploded in Israel's northern metropolis of Haifa Wednesday, although there were no reports of casualties.

And with no ceasefire in sight, foreigners continued to flee the worst violence in Lebanon since Israel sent in its forces in 1982 against Yasser Arafat's Palestine Liberation Organisation.

In Beirut, hundreds of people were waiting to be evacuated by sea while three ships arrived on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus, which lies just 100 miles (160 kilometres) west and is being used as the hub of evacuation operations by Western states.

More Americans are also due to be evacuated on a chartered cruise liner, with warships ordered to waters off the coast to bring out thousands of citizens and provide security amid fears the ships could become a target.

Britain, hoping to evacuate about 5,000 of its nationals by the end of the week, pulled out about 170 Britons on a destroyer.

"It's hell on earth, it's escalating day by day," said Joe Noujeim from England as he arrived in Cyprus, expressing relief at finally getting out with his three young children.

For many ordinary Lebanese there is little chance of such a rescue and many were fleeing their homes in the main target areas such as southern Lebanon to try to find safe havens.

"The situation is both alarming and catastrophic. There are about 500,000 people displaced already. The situation is extreme," the representative of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in Beirut, Roberto Laurenti, told AFP.

The United Nations said it was evacuating all non-essential staff from the country.

As the European Union and the United States prepared to send envoys to the region, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan outlined plans for an international force for Lebanon that he said should be "considerably larger" than the current 2,000-strong UN peacekeeping force.

But Israel - which has always rejected the deployment of foreign forces in its conflict with the Palestinians - said it was "too early" to discuss such a possibility.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice is expected to travel to the region although she was unwilling to be drawn on a specific date, saying she would only come when it is "helpful".

Bush again lashed out at Syria, amid fears the conflict in Lebanon and Gaza could spread across the region, no stranger to war.

"In order to be able to deal with this crisis, the world must deal with Hezbollah, with Syria, and to continue to work to isolate Iran."

Israel, which has sent ground troops back into Lebanon for the first time since it ended its occupation in May 2000, has been emboldened by strong public support at home and the lack of a ceasefire call from its ally Washington.

The international airport has been knocked out, ports bombed, bridges destroyed, power stations set ablaze and houses turned to rubble in scenes reminiscent of the country's devastating 1975-1990 civil war.

Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres said the Jewish state

is not planning to attack Iran or Syria, noting that it already has its "hands full" with Lebanon and the Gaza Strip.

SEVEN KILLED IN GAZA

Seven Palestinians were killed yesterday as Israeli troops moved into a Gaza refugee camp, pushing a campaign to rescue a teenage soldier and stop rocket fire into a fourth week, reports AFP.

Around 70 Palestinians were wounded in Wednesday's incursion and three militants shot dead by Israeli forces operating in the West Bank town of Nablus, where a soldier was killed by a roadside bomb on Tuesday.

In conjunction with Israel's major offensive in Lebanon, where close to 300 people have been killed in eight days of bombardment, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert has vowed to fight the Palestinians until "terrorism stops".

The army said troops moved into the central Gaza Strip from Israel under the cover of darkness late Tuesday, saying the incursion was aimed at targeting "terror infrastructure" around the impoverished Maghazi camp.

"It is a focused operation to target terror infrastructure there, as part of the ongoing effort in which one of its main targets is getting back Gilad Shalit and stopping the launching of Qassam rockets," a spokeswoman said.

Ground troops have been operating inside the Gaza Strip since June 28, when troops rolled back into the territory in a bid to retrieve Shalit, a corporal whose capture sparked the worst Israeli-Palestinian crisis in months.

At least 93 Palestinians and one Israeli soldier have been killed since Israel's assault in Gaza intensified on July 5, with forces currently on the ground both in the central Gaza Strip and in the south.

Amid the hostilities, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana, paying his second visit to the region in days, was scheduled to hold talks with Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas in Gaza City.

International appeals for restraint have fallen on deaf ears and a UN resolution urging Israel to stop the offensive was vetoed by the United States at the Security Council last week.

On Wednesday, seven Palestinians, including three from the armed wing of the governing Hamas that claimed joint responsibility for Shalit's capture, were killed in the central Gaza incursion in which around 70 people were wounded.

Four civilians died when an Israeli tank shell exploded in a built-up area, damaging nearby houses as ground troops entered the northern and eastern edges of Maghazi, medical sources said.

Wounded Palestinians crowded the hall of the nearby Al-Aqsa hospital as overwhelmed doctors struggled to process the casualties, the majority of them civilians, as paramedics ferried in the injured under fire.

Doctor Ibrahim al-Mussadder reported shooting on ambulances, saying one ambulance driver lost his leg to shrapnel from an Israeli tank shell.

The centre of Maghazi was deserted except for ambulances and Palestinian gunmen hunkered down with Kalashnikov and rocket-propelled grenades.

Five Israeli soldiers were wounded when they met resistance from Palestinian gunmen.

Forces returned fire and identified hitting two gunmen, an army spokesman said. There were also two air strikes on cells of armed men in the central Gaza Strip.

The air force carried out another air strike on what it said was a tunnel being dug in the northern Gaza Strip with the intention of "smuggling weapons and terrorists into Israel," the spokesman said.

Bulldozers were digging up farmland and Israeli soldiers had requisitioned some buildings as shooting reverberated around the area, an AFP reporter said.

Israel believes that Shalit, whose capture on June 25 sparked the offensive, and two other servicemen snatched by Lebanon's Hezbollah are still alive.

The humanitarian situation of the 1.4 million people living in Gaza has badly deteriorated since the West suspended direct aid to the Hamas-led government, plunging the territory deeper into financial crisis.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli troops conducting an arrest operation shot dead three Palestinians from the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, the faction that claimed an attack on Tuesday in which an Israeli soldier was killed.

Govt-teachers

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their educational institutes for the consecutively fifteen days

Meanwhile, a frustrated community primary teacher committed suicide by hanging herself from a tree early Wednesday at Sheikhhati under Jessore sadar upazila. The dead was identified as Selina Akhter, 25, daughter of late Azibar Biswas of Sheikhhati under Jessore sadar upazila.

Locals and police said Selina was serving as a teacher for Shantala Community Primary School with Tk 750.

At a press conference, Teachers and employees under the banner of National Front of Teacher and Employees (NFTE) yesterday reiterated their demand for immediate announcement and gazette notification of granting 100 per cent of their basic salary from the government exchequer.

At another press conference, Bangladesh Polytechnic Teachers Association (BPTA) yesterday announced 10-point programmes to secure their demand.

They will also go for indefinite work abstention from August 14 if their demands are not met, the leaders warned.

Why recruitment

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