

Schoolteachers begin hunger strike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Registered non-government primary schoolteachers yesterday began hunger strike until death at Muktagong in the city keeping their educational institutions closed.

The non-government high school, college and madrasa teachers' indefinite strike at the educational institutions will complete its one month tomorrow.

Primary teachers under the banner of Bangladesh Non-government Primary Teachers Association led by Mansur Ali yesterday held a rally at Muktagong and submitted a memorandum to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia demanding nationalisation of their jobs.

Following the rally, the teachers brought out a procession and headed towards the Prime Minister's Office to lay siege to it. Police intercepted the procession at Paltan intersection with barbed

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No specific charge brought against Bhaluka militants

Seven out of 27 JMB men remanded

BISHAWJIT DAS and AMINUL ISLAM, from Bhaluka

Police yesterday produced 27 militants, including the 25 arrested during Wednesday's raid near a Bhaluka madrasa by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and two others nabbed later, before a Mymensingh court under Section 54 without bringing any specific charges.

Police also produced Nuruddin Haider, the landlord and founder of the madrasa -- Al-Jamiatul Islamia Nurul Ulum -- before the court with seven-day remand prayer under an extortion case, filed on

July 28 by an employee of a private TV channel.

The arrested Afghan war veteran Moulana Mufti Abdur Rouf had been running the militant camp at a madrasa in Jibontola village under Bhaluka apazila for years under the nose of law enforcers and administration although police seized huge books and other documents on jihad from the den in 2003.

Rab claimed to have arrested 25 militants including Mufti Abdur Rouf during training at Jamia Islamia Nurul Ulum Madrasa at Jibontola village and recovered bomb-making materials and mili-

tancy-related equipment at 3:00pm on Wednesday.

Later, Rab-9 arrested Abu Huriara and Shafiq at Seed Store Bazar at Bhaluka at 8:30pm.

The two are the students of the same madrasa and had fled from the spot during the raid, Rab said.

Sub-inspector (SI) Rabiul Islam of Bhaluka Police Station yesterday produced the arrested militants before the court of First Class Magistrate Rukhsana Tarannum.

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Ershad's joining 4-party may be bad in long run

Says Saifur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister and senior BNP leader M Saifur Rahman has said Ershad's joining the BNP-led alliance may be good for short term, but bad in the long run.

He told reporters at his office yesterday while replying to a question on how he sees the reported move about Ershad's joining the alliance.

The BNP standing committee member said the party alone will win the elections and return to power as it has done many good works.

He said the regulatory institutions like Anti-Corruption Commission and Tax Ombudsman will have to be strengthened to accelerate development.

WASHINGTON POST 'Bangladesh sees rising Islamic movement with al-Qaeda link'

The Washington Post on Wednesday carried a story headlined "A new hub for terrorism?: In Bangladesh, an Islamic movement with al-Qaeda ties is on the rise." Following is the full text of the article by Selig S Harrison:

While the United States dithers, a growing Islamic fundamentalist movement linked to al-Qaeda and Pakistani intelligence agencies is steadily converting the strategically located nation of Bangladesh into a new regional hub for terrorist operations that reach into India and Southeast Asia.

With 147 million people, largely Muslim Bangladesh has substantial Hindu and Christian minorities and is nominally a secular democracy. But the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) struck a Faustian bargain with the fundamentalist party Jamaat-e-Islami five years ago in order to win power.

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Tk 5.5cr smuggled cigarettes seized from container

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

After a tip-off by a clearing agent, customs officials yesterday confiscated a huge amount of foreign cigarettes inside a 40-foot container, which was officially declared to contain electric touch-lamps, at the Inland Container Depot (ICD) at Kamalapur.

Shipped from the Chinese port of Shen Zen, the container arrived at the Kamalapur ICD from Chittagong port on July 25. The estimated street value of the cigarettes would be around Tk 5.5 crore, customs sources said.

The Commissioner of Customs at the ICD, Almas Uzzaman said they could not trace the importer.

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Many JP MPs to quit if Ershad joins 4-party

Says GM Quader

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Many of the Jatiya Party (JP) legislators, fearing the four-party alliance's defeat in the upcoming general election, may change their platform to contest the polls if JP Chairman Ershad joined the alliance.

"Many of our (JP) lawmakers may quit the party if our chairman took the wrong decision to join the BNP-led alliance," JP Presidium Member GM Quader told The Daily Star yesterday without disclosing their names.

However, most of the party MPs

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OIC MEET ON LEBANON

PM calls for ceasefire

Terms Israel's actions brutal, violation of human rights

UNB, Putrajaya, Malaysia

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday called for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire in Lebanon with total cessation of violence.

Addressing the emergency meeting of the executive committee of OIC, especially on the Lebanon situation, at Hotel Marriot Putrajaya in Putrajaya, the prime minister strongly condemned Israel for the brutality of its actions and the blatant violation of human rights.

She also called for urgent deployment of an international force for stabilising the Israeli-Lebanon border under the United Nations (UN).

Placing the demands at the OIC meet, the prime minister observed that political issues cannot be



resolved by military means-- history has proved time and again the futility of this approach.

"Violence begets violence. Its continuation carries the danger of a spillover that will have disastrous consequences. This will surely add to radicalisation in the Muslim

world. The latter, in turn, will increase difficulties for those of us on the side of moderation," she said.

The prime minister mooted a four-point proposal for brokering peace on the war front that also includes holding of an UN-sponsored conference on ways and means of enhancing the authority of the Lebanese government and immediate reconstruction of its economy and infrastructure.

She also stressed the need for UN-sponsored comprehensive Middle East peace by ensuring formation of an independent and sovereign state of Palestine.

Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, the current chairman of the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference), opened the one-day emergency

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UN powers close to ME truce deal

10,000 Israeli ground troops fighting in Lebanon villages

AFP, REUTERS, Beirut

Israel launched fresh air strikes on Beirut yesterday after a lull of several days, while UN powers inched toward agreement on a Security Council resolution to end the three-week-old conflict.

Premier Ehud Olmert reiterated in a newspaper interview that Israel would not halt its offensive against Hezbollah guerrillas in south Lebanon until an interna-

tional force of some 15,000 combat-ready troops was deployed there.

The difficulty of assembling such a force was highlighted when the United Nations postponed a meeting of potential troop-contributing countries for a second time.

Hiszbollah guerrillas killed seven people in a rocket barrage on Israel and three Israeli soldiers in fighting

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GDP growth slows down in Q4

MCCI says concerns high about politics, weakening governance

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) review says the country's economic performance in the 4th quarter (April-June of FY06) indicates that growth in GDP was marginally slower than that in the 3rd quarter of the current fiscal.

However, analysing observations by some entrepreneurs the chamber said the economy is still

on the growth path, though concern has been expressed as to how long the economic growth momentum can withstand the continuing political confrontations and weakening of the institutions of economic and political governance.

"Complaints have been made about deteriorating supply of electricity and gas, widespread corruption, discretionary powers

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VOTER LIST UPDATE

Saifur now to allocate required fund

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, who once refused to allocate fresh fund for updating the voter list, yesterday surprisingly came up with an assurance of providing the Election Commission (EC) with as much money as it requires.

In the wake of the EC Secretary Abdur Rashid Sarkar's remark that the allocation of Tk 25 crore against the demand of Tk 40.86 crore was

inadequate, the finance minister told reporters, "Definitely, we will provide whatever amount of fund they require to update the voter list."

Officials at the EC Secretariat hinted that they might seek further allocation of Tk 15 crore.

Earlier on July 18, the finance minister refused to allocate fresh fund for updating the voter list, leading to a slow start of the work.

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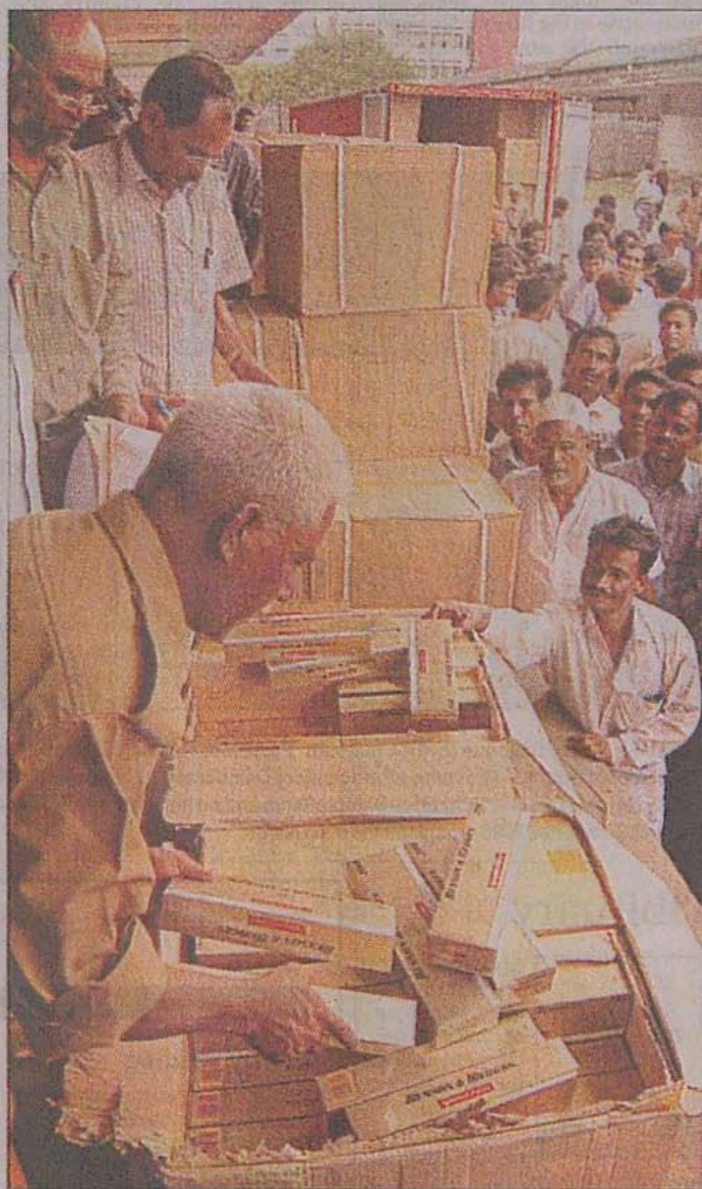


PHOTO: STAR

Customs officials seize smuggled foreign cigarettes worth around Tk 5.5 crore from a container at the Inland Container Depot at Kamalapur in the capital yesterday.

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Cricket Update

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4th ODI today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's hope to win their first series abroad depends on how the cricketers react after a dreadful finish in the third match on Wednesday when the tourists face Zimbabwe in the fourth one-day international in Harare today.

Zimbabwe snatched victory from the jaws of defeat as Brendan Taylor rattled 18 runs in the final

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