

Babar backs cop action

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brickbats despite the police announcement reminding them about the Dhaka Metropolitan Police ban on gatherings, he said.

He however admitted that neither former home minister Mohammad Nasim nor Noor had any stick or brickbat in their hands that could provoke the law-enforcement agencies.

"But breaking the barricade, the opposition activists started to hurl brickbats at the police. They went into action after making announcement several times," he said. "What the police did was to control the law and order situation. They had no other choice then."

On Tuesday, The Daily Star along with most of the print and electronic media however reported in detail how the police suddenly launched attacks on benign opposition gatherings without provocation. "Undergoing treatment at Bangladesh Medical College Hospital, a badly battered Nasim is still in a state of unconsciousness. The condition of Noor has improved well at Holy Family Hospital."

Babar meanwhile argued that the same incident would have happened in a reverse situation with the AL in power and BNP out there to lay siege to the PMO office in a militant mood.

He however regretted the attack on the two opposition lawmakers, terming the incident "unexpected".

Asked why frontline opposition leaders like Saber Hossain Chowdhury and Nasim are being attacked, Babar dodged a direct reply. "Those who attacked were constable-level policemen."

"You know, two policemen were killed recently. Their hearts are broken, and they (police) might have lost their senses," he quipped.

On the possibility of the police's carrying out a government order for such attack, he said, "They did not wait for order."

Asked repeatedly whether the government would take any step against the policemen responsible for attacks on Nasim and Noor, Babar said they were examining the whole situation.

But talking to the BBC Bangla Service, he played down the possibility of legal action against the police and went on to say that the "protesters themselves broke the law."

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina recently instructed her workers to take on police, and it might have encouraged opposition activists to break the law, he predicted.

On the AL's demand for a parliament, he said,

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common rivers and a large number of tributaries while the state of Tripura alone shares 10 rivers.

Water resources ministry officials said the ministers will visit places through which the common rivers flow including the areas adjacent to Ichhamoti and Kalindi rivers.

They will also visit river embankments, irrigation sites and a water treatment project along the Indo-Bangla border, the officials added.

"After the visit, both sides will meet in Kolkata on September 15 and 16," the senior official said adding that the Indian delegation will then come to visit the border points of those rivers in Bangladesh.

On September 18, they will visit the border points in Khagachhari and Feni through which the shared rivers flow into Bangladesh.

They will later meet in Dhaka on September 19 and 20. The Indian delegation will leave Dhaka on September 21.

The decision to visit the erosion prone spots in both countries was taken during the 36th Joint River Commission meeting in September last year.

The visit had been earlier scheduled for May, but was postponed following unrest in the readymade garments sector in Bangladesh.

Tougher movement

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"Many owners will be forced to close their factories if the proposed pay scale for the garment workers is implemented," BGMEA President SM Fazlul Huq told reporters yesterday.

A few days ago, when announcing new structure for the RMG workers seemed imminent, BGMEA asked its members to remain alert and take steps so that the factory owners can handle their workers in the face of any type of 'provocation from outside'.

Rejecting the proposed pay structure, the garment workers' leader Mosharefa Mishu at a procession at Muktagang said minimum wage below Tk 3,000 will not be acceptable.

She urged the wage board to review the proposed one and immediately announce Tk 3,000 minimum wage for the garment sector workers. Nobody will be able to stop the movement by lodging cases against the leaders of workers' organisations, Mishu said.

The unrest in May and June took place only in Savar and Gazipur, she said, adding that if the owners do not accept the workers' demand, labour unrest will spread across the country.

Advocate Mahbubur Rahman Ismail, Shahidul Islam Sobuj and other leaders of Garment Sramik O Shilpa Raksha Jatiya Mancha, an alliance of 16 organisations, addressed the rally.

Another alliance of 16 organisations of garment workers in a joint statement said it is not possible for the garment workers to survive with the proposed minimum wage considering price hike of essentials

mentary committee to probe attack on Nasim and Noor, he said, "We're thinking what to do."

Babar also observed that the gap between the opposition and the police widened further.

Most hazardous

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Executive Director Shaheen Anam said the information collected from the surveys of different researchers should be coordinated to assess the actual condition of ship breaking industry.

The workers, owners and the government have to look into the matter jointly, she said. The NGOs and civil society can only facilitate the process.

"We are not against ship breaking, but human being is the first priority. So, the workers who are subjected to rights violation, should be given their due dignity," Shaheen Anam said.

Captain Enam Chowdhury, member of Ship Breaking Owners' Association tried to defend the owners saying the industry has a big role in the national economy and that they are trying to improve the working condition.

The industry now has no child labour while fish production in the area is decreasing because of rampant fishing and use of 'current net, he said.

Deputy Editor of the Prothom Alo Sajjad Sharif moderated the dialogue.

Other speakers included Shamsul Alam and Farid Ahmed of the Directorate of Factory Inspection, Mirza Shawkat Ali of Department of Environment, Imam Hossain of Industries ministry, Toharak Mollah, advisor to Chittagong BGMEA, Sultan Mahmud of BLS, journalist Omar Kaiser and Mamun Abdullah, Rina Roy of Manusher Jono, workers leaders ATM Nasiruddin and Salimullah Selim.

PM threatens

FROM PAGE 1
Khaleda, also chairperson of the ruling BNP, said there are nearly two months to hand over power by the government to a caretaker government, so there is no need to create chaos during this short period of time.

But the opposition wants to create chaos and anarchy so that her government cannot transfer power peacefully and timely to the caretaker government by completing the rest of the ongoing development works.

"But we will hand over power to caretaker government timely and peacefully according to the constitution," she told the gathering, sending her message for her political rivals who undertook a programme for laying siege to the Prime Minister's Office.

"The PM said the caretaker government would hold the upcoming general election within three months of takeover from her government at the end of October."

She observed that if the trend of democracy continues, peace and development would be maintained to attain country's prosperity. "So conspiracy is going on in a well-planned way to thwart the democratic process."

Referring to the opposition's PMO-gherao programme, she said they damaged public property through resorting to "vandalism and anarchy."

Police were silent, but when the opposition activists swooped on them with stick, the police personnel were compelled to disperse the activists, she said.

Communications Minister Nazmul Huda, Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Huq, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selma Rahman, PM's Political Secretary

Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Youth Fuzur Rahman, Rajshahi Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu and local MP Harun-or-Rashid addressed the meeting.

Pumps overwork

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was 195mm this July. A total of 526mm rainfall was recorded in the district in August 2005 while it was only 250mm this year.

Sribas Ghosh, a farmer of Malika Hat village in Natore district, said he earlier produced 4.4 metric ton broadcast Aman on about five hectares of land. He feared he may not get more than half a metric ton of rice from the same land this year due to the prolonged drought.

Mansur Rahman, upazila agriculture extension officer of Natore sadar upazila, said at least 25 per cent production of broadcast Aman has already been hampered due to persistent drought in the area.

At least 82,000 irrigation implements including 1,230 deep tube wells have been running continuously in Rangpur region in order to keep the transplanted and broadcast Aman plants living.

Rangpur DAE additional director's office sources said rainfall in eight districts under the DAE Rangpur region in July 2005 was recorded at 4,941.32mm whereas it was 2,402.79mm in July this year.

In August last year, rainfall was recorded 4,553.37mm in the same area, which stood at only 1,316.60mm this August.

DAE Rajshahi region office sources said at least 1,02,669 irrigation machines including 5,623 deep tube wells are operating round the clock in different areas, including Barendra region, of eight districts.

Sources said 1,721.10mm rainfall was recorded here in July this year whereas 3,533.80mm rainfall was recorded in July 2005. Again, 1,723.80mm rainfall was recorded in the region in August this year while 2,973.7mm rainfall was recorded in August last year.

DAE officials said there is no previous record of drought of this magnitude in the northern part of the country during the rainy season. Cultivation of broadcast and transplanted Aman paddy depends on natural rainfall and hardly requires irrigation, they added.

EU mission

FROM PAGE 1
EU election observation team in Bangladesh. EU mission chief Andrew Bruce told reporters after the meeting.

The EU team is in Bangladesh to observe the pre-election situation of the country—whether the situation is in favour of holding the election, Bruce said, adding, "We've started talking to the political parties. We're listening to their views on election."

Prof Chowdhury told reporters that the EU team cited instances of solving disputes on different issues between political parties in different countries through discussion and said that this can also be possible in Bangladesh.

"We told the EU delegation that the people of this country do not have any confidence in the present chief election commissioner (CEC) and that we will not go for election under this CEC," he added.

"The EU team has informed us that they might send two election observation teams—one two months ahead of the election and another one day before the election."

"The situation prevailing at present is totally against taking part in the election," Prof Chowdhury told the EU delegation, adding that politicised government and police officials will have to be either closed or made OSD (officer on special duty).

EU delegation members Ana Beatriz Martins, Pascaline Krone, Jenny Christensen, and EU Ambassador in Bangladesh Dr Stefan Frowein, BDB Secretary General Major (ret'd) Abdul Mannan, Joint Secretary Firoz M Hasan and Prof Nurul Amin Bepari were present at the meeting.

Later, the EU mission met with donor agencies and countries at the EU office at Gulshan-2. MEETING WITH JUSTICE KM HASAN

The EU mission last night had a meeting with former Chief Justice KM Hasan who is supposed to be the chief of the next caretaker government.

During the 90-minute meeting at Justice Hasan's Dhanmondi residence, the EU team discussed various issues relating to upcoming general election with the ex-chief justice under whom the main opposition parties have refused to take part in election, sources said.

EU mission chief Andrew Bruce, Ana Beatriz Martins and Hannah Roberts, among others, were present at that meeting.

2 unauthorised

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Aziz Super Market and found 35 bags of blood.

Golam H Milon, one of the owners of the business told the court that they had applied for permission at the Directorate General of Health in 1995 and have been conducting illegal business ever since without any permission.

"Like all other illegal blood banks, they also did not conduct any cross-match. They didn't even preserve it properly," said Sarder Md Keramat Ali, the magistrate who led the mobile court and raided three other illegal private blood banks earlier.

"They are supposed to preserve the blood in ice liner refrigerators which they did not comply," he said. "Even the reagent they were using to identify the blood group had been expired," he added.

The second blood bank the court raided was Rai Blood Bank and Pathology also at Aziz Super Market where the owners and workers had already locked up and escaped the facility before the court arrived.

The court broke into the place and found 19 bags blood from there. Later, the court sealed off both illegal blood banks.

Both blood banks were running without any licence or permission from the Directorate General of Health and the Drug Administration. They did not have any trade licence either.

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Govt retreats

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cases were 'politically motivated'.

Following news reports on two national dailies yesterday regarding the cases, the government changed its decision and the PP submitted two petitions stating that the letter issued by the home ministry was 'forged'. Therefore, the government would not withdraw the cases.

Judge Mohammad Aman Ullah of the Fifth Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka fixed October 10 and November 5 for hearing on the petitions.

The two brothers Mohammad Sobaban and Mohammad Selim lived in South Begunbari slum in the city's Tejaoga area.

According to the prosecution, a team of Tejaoga police led by its then officer-in-charge (OC) raided Nannu's shanty at South Begunbari and arrested Sobaban with 280 bottles of Phensidyl on November 11, 1999. Sensing police presence, his brother Selim and two others fled the scene.

Sub-inspector Sirajul Islam filed a case in this connection under the Special Powers Act, 1974 against Sobaban, Selim and the two others with Tejaoga Police Station on the same day.

The investigation officer (IO) of the case pressed charges against the two brothers and dropped names of other two as their involvement with the offence was not proved.

Later, another case was filed against the brothers with the same police station as a team of police on June 30, 2000 raided their shanty and seized 240 bottles of Phensidyl.

The IO pressed charges against the two brothers on July 23 the same year and the court framed charges against them on March 25, 2003. The court recorded statements of three prosecution witnesses.

On August 14 this year, the home ministry in two letters

informed the district magistrate of Dhaka that it had decided to withdraw the charges against Sobaban and Selim as the charges were 'politically motivated'.

The ministry asked the district magistrate to hand over the matter to the metropolitan PP who would arrange withdrawal of the cases with permission from an appropriate court.

Clashes mark

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centres and educational institutions remained closed, presence in the government offices was very thin and coaches did not ply.

Hartal was also observed in all the six upazilas of the district. Kishoreganj upazila unit Chhatra League President Pilot Shah and Jubo League leader Faruk Ahmed were seriously injured in police beating during the hartal.

A large number of police has been deployed at important spots of the tense district town. Educational institutions and markets remained closed and highway transports suspended during yesterday's half-day hartal in the district, reports our Pabna correspondent.

Picketers demonstrated at least 15 vehicles in the district town. At a meeting in front of the district AL office, the speakers demanded punishment of the policemen responsible for assaulting lawmakers Mohammad Nasim and Asaduzzaman Noor, and over a hundred opposition activists in the capital during the opposition's PMO siege program on Tuesday.

Our Sirajganj correspondent adds: All modes of transport were off the roads while offices, educational institutions, banks and business establishments remained closed during yesterday's half-day hartal enforced by the district Awami League.

Additional police forces have been deployed in the town to avert any untoward incident, police said.

FNB worried

FROM PAGE 1
Tuesday, presided over by its Chair Dr Muhammad Ibrahim, said the NGO community of the country is upset at the sudden mass arrest of Proshika staff. The federation also expressed its grave concern, anxiety and resentment over the incident and asked the authorities to disclose precisely why such arrests have been made, the press release said.

Meantime, 14 Proshika officials including its deputy director Sirajul Islam, were released on bail yesterday. Proshika sources said.

Our correspondent from Barisal reports that two more Proshika officials were arrested on Tuesday, amid the ongoing police raids on local and regional offices of the NGO in the division.

The arrestees are Sarwar Hossain Bhuiyan, 30, an office superintendent, and Sarwar Howlader, 26, a peon. They were sent to jail under section 54 for their alleged links with activities creating unrest in the country.

Different social and development organisations in Barisal yesterday condemned the harassments on Proshika and demanded immediate release of the arrestees.

UNB from Chittagong says—The police locked the Chittagong Divisional office of Proshika yesterday morning.

At least 19 Proshika employees were arrested in different parts of the district in the last three days, sources said. They were arrested under section 54 on charge of anti-state activities, the police said.

Protesting the arrest and harassment of Proshika staff, Sammitia Nagorik Andolon held a rally on the premises of Chittagong Press Club yesterday afternoon.

The crackdown on Proshika was launched allegedly in suspicion of the organisation's preparation to send a large number of people to Dhaka to take part in the 14-party programme of laying siege to the Prime Minister's Office on September 12 and an opposition grand rally scheduled for September 18.

Violence rages

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taking part in a security crackdown. An average of 51 people a day died violently last month in the capital, according to the Iraqi Health Ministry.

Some lawmakers squabbled over a resolution demanding a timetable for US troop withdrawal, and others failed to resolve a deadlock over a Shiite-sponsored bill that Sunni Arabs fear will curtail the country.

A group of lawmakers tried to capitalize Tuesday on the unpopularity of US troops among many Shiite and Sunni legislators, seeking approval of a resolution setting a timetable for the withdrawal of all foreign troops, which the Shiite-dominated government has so far refused to do.

Sponsored by supporters of radical cleric Muqtada al-Sadr and some Sunni Arabs, the resolution managed to gather 104 signatures in the 275-member parliament before it was effectively shelved by being sent to a committee for review.

No headway was made on parliament's most contentious issue since it reconvened last week from summer recess legislation that will set in place the mechanism for establishing autonomous regions as part of a federal Iraq.

Sunni Arabs have said the bill could split the country into three distinct sectarian and ethnic cantons and have vehemently opposed it.

Although federalism is part of Iraq's new constitution, and there is already an autonomous Kurdish region in the north, special legislation and a referendum would be needed to turn Iraq into a full federation.

Parliament's biggest political bloc, the Shiite United Iraqi Alliance submitted the bill last week. It would be the first step toward creating a separate autonomous state in the predominantly Shiite south, much like the zone run by Kurds in the north.

Objections from Sunni Arabs and an apparent split among Shiites led leaders to delay the debate until September 19.

Rupali staff

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packages for those who wish to leave, a high official of the ministry said.

Sources said presently there are about 5,000 staffs in the Rupali Bank and one third of them either is aged over 50 years or have completed at least 20 years of service.

Privatisation Commission Chairman Inam Ahmed Chowdhury, who was present at the meeting, said he is hopeful to complete the sales and purchase agreement with Saudi Prince Bandar Bin Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman Al-Saud by month end.

The prince will pay \$330 million in a single chunk before signing the agreement.

About \$200 million of the amount will be spent for liabilities of the bank that include defaulted loans and pension. "But the amount will not be spent at a time; it is a continuous process," a ministry source said.

The government in a scheme will have to pay the pensions of the bank staff retiring before the bank's final takeover.

The public sector defaulted loans will be turned into a single loan and the government will pay the accumulated amount in seven half-yearly instalments. The government will issue a bond for the defaulted loans in the private sector.

The cabinet committee also approved injecting fresh capital for the bank as it holds 26 per cent share. "Initially the committee will have to inject a capital of Tk 119 crore of the total Tk 400 crore," one source said.

Meanwhile, the visiting mission of the International Monetary Fund yesterday met the Privatisation Commission chairman and prescribed to privatise three other nationalised commercial banks.

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World power split

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France and other EU nations are wary of cornering the world's No. 4 oil exporter and, to varying degrees, want more time to find a diplomatic compromise.

"It's Thursday. (The meeting) will be somewhere in Europe, not in Brussels," said Solana spokeswoman Cristina Gallach, adding the aim of the meeting was "to prepare the conditions in order if possible to start negotiations."

The Iranian news agency IRNA quoted an "informed source" as saying the talks could be held in Paris. Solana and Larjani last round of talks was in Vienna on Saturday and Sunday.

Western leaders condemned Iran's disregard of an August 31 U.N. Security Council deadline to suspend its uranium enrichment programme, which Iran insists is meant only to make electricity.

The Islamic Republic, while indicating openness to negotiate on a timing and duration of suspension, refuses to take that step before negotiations on a big power offer of trade incentives not to develop nuclear fuel.

Washington says Iran's defiance should trigger steps to sanctions. The U.S., British, French, German, Russian and Chinese foreign ministers will meet on the fringes of the U.N. General Assembly in New York next week to discuss proceeding to sanctions if there has been no diplomatic breakthrough by then.

"We are already working with other members of the Security Council on a resolution that would lay out very specific sanctions," Gregory Schulte, U.S. ambassador to the watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency, said in an interview.

"We want to hear one very clear message coming back through the line of communications (between Solana and Larjani), and that is that Iran is suspending... if we don't hear that, we are moving forward with the sanctions resolution," he told Reuters.

But Washington's fellow veto-holders on the Council, China and Russia, as well as Germany and

Foundation laid

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construction work of distribution network mainly out of political considerations," he told The Daily Star.

He said the ruling alliance made a pledge before 2001 general election that it would arrange gas supply for Rajshahi and Khulna if voted to power.

The power, energy and mineral resources ministry in a report submitted to the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry on April 10 this year disclosed that gas supply to Rajshahi city through pipelines has been planned for 2009.

The ministry, which is under the prime minister's direct supervision, said in the report that the government has taken a project to set up pipelines to supply gas to Rajshahi and Khulna regions.

The foundation stone laying ceremony took place at Kharkhari, 10 kilometres off the divisional city where land acquisition for the project is yet to be completed.

Officials concerned, however told The Daily Star preferring anonymity that the entire project worth US \$430 million is still at the study phase and supplying gas to Rajshahi from Sirajganj will need minimum three years.

Following a movement of local people in 2004, local politicians belonging to the ruling alliance forced senior officials of Gas Transmission Company Limited (GTCL) to pledge in public that gas would reach Rajshahi within 2006, said the sources.