

Clashes mark hartal in Pabna, Nilphamari, Sirajganj

STAR REPORT

Police action and sporadic clashes marked yesterday's half-day hartal called by district units of main opposition Awami League (AL) in Nilphamari, Pabna and Sirajganj protesting Tuesday's police assault on two AL lawmakers - Mohammad Nasim from Sirajganj, and Asaduzzaman Noor from Nilphamari.

In Nilphamari, at least 20 people including a newsman were injured in clashes between Awami League (AL) and BNP activists and police action during the hartal, reports our Nilphamari correspondent.

When a big procession led by district Awami League leaders attacked the BNP office at Paura Market area, fierce clashes between the BNP and AL activists left four BNP activists and a Jubo League leader injured.

As police charged baton, the activists of Awami League and BNP moved away and police took position between them.

After a while, regrouped BNP and Awami League activists broke the police cordon and got locked into clashes. Hit by brickbats, district correspondent of Bangla Vision TV channel Shuvash Biswas and two policemen were injured.

At one stage, police indiscriminately charged baton, injuring 10 to 12 people including BNP and AL activists and passers-by.

Due to the tense situation, the half-day hartal virtually turned into a full day one, as shops, business

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DIALOGUE ON SHIP-BREAKING INDUSTRY

Most hazardous, need national policy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing grave concern over the environmental impact and hazardous working condition in the ship breaking industries in Chittagong, economists, academics and human rights activists at a national dialogue yesterday suggested formulation of a national policy for this sector.

While ship breaking is yet to be recognised as an industry in the country, the government already earns more than Tk 900 crore a year in revenue from the sector that employs over 20,000 people, they noted.

This sector has tremendous prospects but the issues of environment and workers' rights should be addressed on an emergency basis, they said.

The Prothom Alo and Young Power in Social Action (YPSA), an NGO, organised the dialogue on crisis and prospects of ship breaking industry in Bangladesh, in association with Manusher Jonno Foundation and held at Cirdap auditorium in the capital.

A national policy on the industry has to be formulated urgently with the participation of all stakeholders before a global regulatory mechanism is in place, said Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Debapriya Bhattacharyya.

There is a huge lack of information on the sector. Around seven

government agencies are involved in the sector but no ministry takes the responsibility of looking after it.

There is no specific statistics on ships imported for breaking, investment and annual profit and no information on how the industry impacts environment and how workers' rights are ensured, Dr Debapriya regretted. "Unless such information is gathered, we cannot take any position."

Bangladesh has the second largest ship breaking industry, next to India's. While investment in the sector is around Tk 3,000 crore, workers get only Tk 70 to 80 a day, which is lower than that of agricultural workers, the economist mentioned.

In his presentation, YPSA Programme Officer Mohammad Ali Shaheen said workers of the industry neither have job security nor arrangements for compensation when needed.

Water pollution in the sea adjacent to the industry is caused by toxic chemicals from the industry destroying bio-diversity, he said. Waste management system in the industry area must be developed to prevent environmental pollution, he stressed.

Unnayan Samannay Chairman Dr Atiur Rahman said production of fish in seawater is declining due to pollutants from the industry, sanitation facilities for 50 to 60 per cent workers are very poor and 10 per cent workers are vulnerable to

AIDS.

He suggested setting up a laboratory for chemical tests and strengthening inspection system so that ships with toxic chemicals cannot enter the country. Certification system could be introduced to this end, and the industries minister can take the lead in this regard, he said.

Stressing the need for ensuring workers' rights and facilities, the economist said, "We don't want a situation in ship breaking industry as in garments sector in recent time."

Marine Science Professor Maruf Hossain of Chittagong University (CU) said ship breaking industries are located in developing countries as those are environmentally too hazardous.

Toxic chemicals used in building ships seriously affects environment, he said, adding that this causes human deformities.

LK Siddiqui MP criticised owners of the ship breaking industries saying that they employ workers through contractors who take no responsibility for their safety, health hazards or accidents.

Prof Shafiqur Rahman Chowdhury of CU said there should be a mechanism to continuously monitor the impact of chemicals on the bio-diversity of the sea and areas adjacent to the ship breaking industry.

Manusher Jonno Foundation

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2 unauthorised blood banks sealed off

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A mobile court yesterday raided and sealed off two more unauthorised private blood banks where around 54 bags of hazardous blood had been collected from professional donors.

The court held one Golam H Milon, owner of one of the blood banks, and dispatched him to jail as he was unable to pay a fine of Tk 50,000.

Blood in some of the bags expired and turned blue as those were preserved in regular household refrigerators without proper testing and without any date of collection.

This blood could be lethal to the users, said experts present with the mobile court.

The court discarded the blood and destroyed the bags.

In the first recovery, the mobile court raided Royal Blood Bank at 53

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PHOTO: STAR

A mobile court seizes blood bags from an unauthorised blood bank at Aziz Super Market in Shahbagh in the capital yesterday.

GAS IN RAJSHAHI Foundation laid but no supply before 2009

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday laid the foundation stone for Rajshahi Gas Distribution Project, while the Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources has no plan to supply gas to Rajshahi through pipelines before 2009.

Very soon the city people will witness digging of soil for setting up underground distribution pipelines in the city, project officials told the prime minister who is also the chairperson of ruling BNP, which promised before the last parliamentary election that if it was voted to power it would ensure supply of gas to Rajshahi.

Rajshahi Gas Andolon Parishad Convener Mahtab Uddin however termed the laying of the foundation stone as 'political'.

"It is still uncertain when installation of transmission lines will be completed. The prime minister is hurriedly launching the

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Violence rages through Iraq; 65 bodies found

AP, Baghdad, Iraq

Police yesterday found the bodies of 65 men who had been tortured, shot and dumped, most around Baghdad, while car bombs, mortar attacks and shootings killed at least 30 people around Iraq and injured dozens more.

Two US soldiers were killed, one by an attack in restive Anbar province Monday, and the other Tuesday by a roadside bomb south of Baghdad, the US military command said.

Police said 60 of the bodies were found overnight around Baghdad, with the majority dumped in predominantly Sunni Arab neighborhoods, police said. Another five were found floating down the Tigris river in Suwayrah, 25 miles south of the capital.

The bodies were bound, bore signs of torture and had been shot,

said police 1st Lt. Thayer. Such killings are usually the work of death squads -- both Sunni Arab and Shiite -- who kidnap people and often torture them with power drills or beat them badly before shooting them.

Forty-five of the victims were discovered in predominantly Sunni Arab parts of western Baghdad, and 15 were found in mostly Shiite areas of eastern Baghdad.

In the capital, a car bomb killed at least 19 people and wounded more than 62 after it detonated in a large square used mostly as a parking lot near the main headquarters of Baghdad's traffic police department, police said. At least two of the dead were traffic police officers.

In eastern Baghdad, a bomb in a parked car exploded next to a passing Iraqi police patrol in the Zayona neighborhood, killing 8

people and wounding 17, police said. At least 3 of the dead and 7 of the wounded were police officers.

Two mortar shells landed on al-Rashad police station in south-eastern Baghdad, killing a policeman and wounding two others, police said. Another two policemen were killed when two mortar rounds landed near their station in Baghdad's eastern neighborhood of Mashtal. Three others were injured.

In the former insurgent stronghold of Fallujah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, two pedestrians were killed and two others injured, apparently in the crossfire between US troops and unidentified gunmen in the city's main market, police said.

Baghdad has been the focus of most of Iraq's violence, and thousands of US and Iraqi forces are

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PHOTO: STAR

Traders bring in boats full of clay showpieces from Srinagar to cater to a sizeable clientele in the capital. The picture was taken from Rayerbazar area yesterday.

Criminal killed in 'shootout'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A man with criminal records was killed in a 'shootout' between Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and his accomplices at Khilgaon in the capital in early hours yesterday.

The dead is Nannu Miah, 28, an accused in at least 20 cases for murder and mugging.

According to a Rab-3 press release, being tipped off, a team of Rab-3 raided a house at Mirpur section 1 on Tuesday morning

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Rupali staff won't be retrenched

Cabinet body okays Saudi offer

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman yesterday said the existing staff of Rupali Bank will not be retrenched despite privatisation of the bank.

"No staff of Rupali Bank will lose job, rather new opportunities will be created after selling of the bank," Saifur said after a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs that approved the proposal for selling 67 per cent shares of the bank to the Saudi prince.

"The Saudi prince also assured that no staff will be forced to leave," sources said.

Meeting sources, however, said the cabinet committee decided to offer a voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) to the bank's

employees who are aged over 50 years or have served for over 20 years. "The staffs have the right either to accept or decline the offer," a finance ministry source said referring to the meeting decision.

"It will be wise for those to leave upon attractive compensations who will fail to adopt the new work environment that includes high-tech services," the source added.

Sources in the finance ministry said they have already prepared the VRS and it is likely to be offered to the Rupali Bank staffs next week. "The VRS is an offer to reduce the bank's workforce before its total privatisation and there is attractive

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Pumps overwork to irrigate Aman fields

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Massive irrigation has been in operation round the clock to water over 17 lakh hectares of Aman paddy fields in 16 northern districts afflicted by prolonged drought in this rainy season.

Sources at the additional director offices of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) Rajshahi and Rangpur said over 1,85,489 pumps are presently irrigating the Aman paddy fields.

A total of 1,90,000 hectares of land has been earmarked for Aman cultivation in 12 upazilas in Bogra district while more than 2,500 hectares of fields in eastern areas of the district still lie fallow for want of water, said Abul Bashar, deputy director of DAE Bogra.

Rainfall was recorded in Bogra in July last year at 509mm while it

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PHOTO: STAR

Croplands in Bogra has developed fissure due to prolonged drought.

Prayer Timing		
September 14		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-35	5-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-14	6-17
Esha	7-45	8-15

Source: Islamic Foundation