

Artillery duels rend Kabul

KABUL, May 11: A new war front opened in Kabul early today when scores of artillery shells were exchanged by three duelling factions in yet another violation of a two-month-old ceasefire agreement, reports AFP.

Fighting centred around Darulaman palace at the end of a three-kilometre (two miles) long avenue linking central Kabul with its southern-most outskirts.

For five hours tank and rocket shells reportedly fired by Hezb-i-Islami faction of Mujahideen besieging Kabul exploded in both the palace and surrounding buildings, sending giant plumes of smoke and debris skywards.

The Darulaman area is shared by two military factions, Ahmad Shah Masood's Defence Minister forces, and General Abdul Momen's 70th division infantry.

Momen, a deputy of the former pro-communist Uzbek militia warlord General Abdur Rashid Dostam, remained neutral in the previous round of factional clashes in Kabul last January-February.

Unconfirmed reports by civilians indicated that Hezb Guerillas attacks Momen's men early Tuesday forcing them back from one of their front-line positions.

"When they found it impossible to hold their posts they fled, but before doing so they

looted our houses," sobbed Karim Ali.

A spokesman from Momen's Kabul office commented they had retaliated against the Hezb attack.

All and some hysterical family members were trying to find transport to ferry their wounded to hospital.

Ali said his house had been hit by a rocket, but had no idea from which direction it had come.

"It's all mixed up. They were shooting from every direction," Ali said.

While Hezb-shelled Darulaman and adjacent government post Defence Ministry batteries in north Kabul bombarded the Hezb in the south.

The military situation around Darulaman is complex, with small and isolated pockets of fighters from opposing factions often separated from their main force.

On the hills behind Darulaman Hezb have positioned tanks in posts that locals said formerly belonged to the Defence Ministry, these posts were rumoured to have been sold to Hezb by their local commanders.

The most vulnerable Defence Ministry post is a former communist secret police garrison surrounded on three sides by renegade Mujahideen

factions, with Momen's men guarding their rear. This too, received a heavy pounding by Hezb.

One anti-Masood faction, the pro-Iranian Shi'ite Hezb-i-Wahdat, was not involved in the fighting at Darulaman, even though Wahdat and Hezb are allies.

But Wahdat and Masood's forces reengaged in a war of attrition elsewhere in Kabul, with daily exchanges of long-range rockets and infantry artillery.

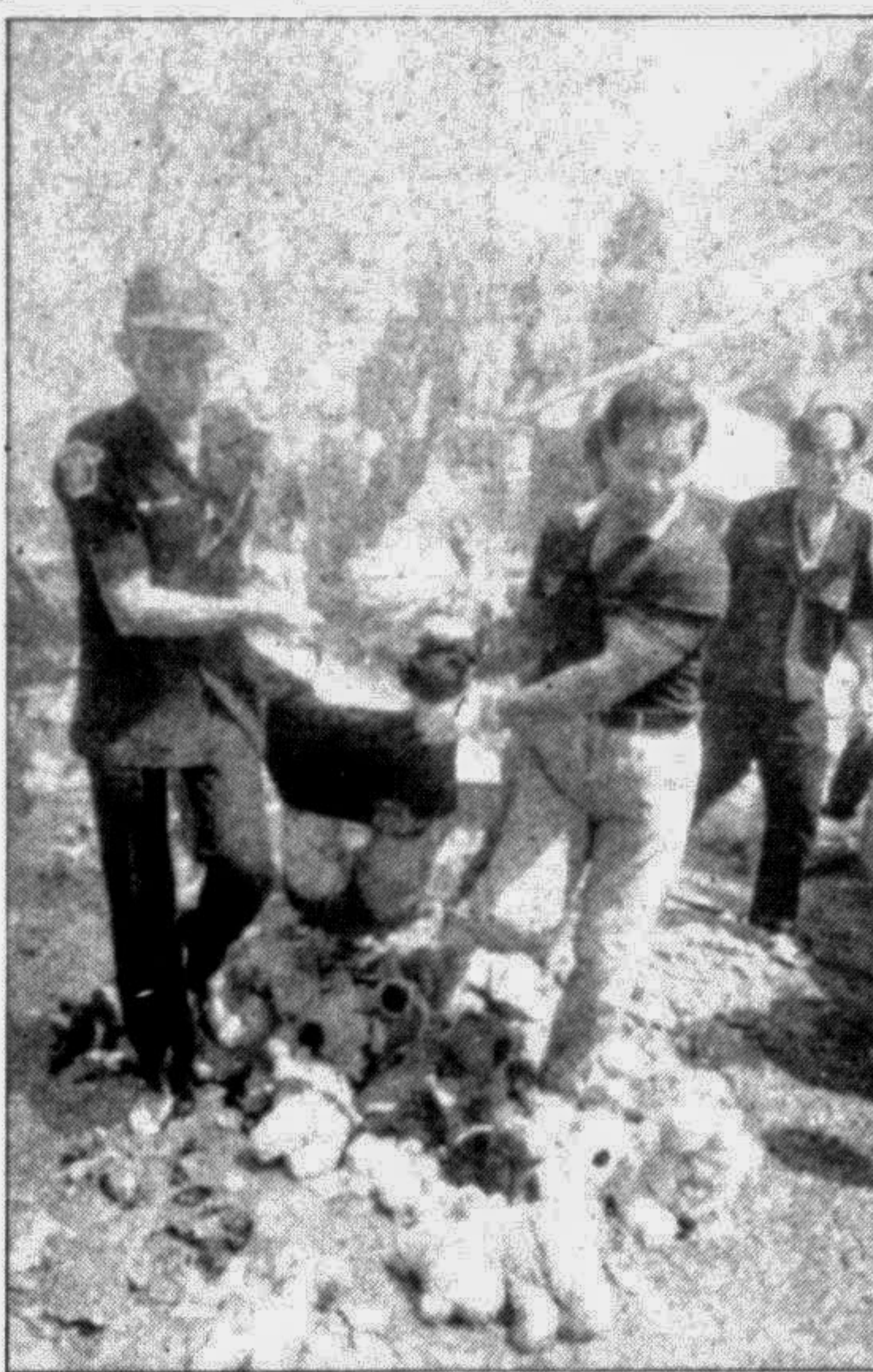
From their frontline bunkers and trenches facing Darulaman, Wahdat guerrillas drank tea and watched with fascination as Hezb rounds bracketed the old place.

At a Defence Ministry army Brigade headquarters just behind the palace, the Hezb incoming ignited a huge fire. The Wahdat gunmen speculated an ammunition dump had taken a direct hit.

"Let's go for Kebabs. They won't be bothering us for some time yet," announced a gleeful Wahdat commander.

In the previous clashes at Darulaman, where 60 years ago King Amanullah intended to establish a satellite city and seat of parliament, the palace was nearly, but not quite demolished in Hezb barrages.

Today's shelling could finish the job.



Rescue workers carrying a body among dismembered toys strewn around the factory which burnt to ground May 10 in Bangkok. Searches are still continuing. — AFP photo

210 killed in Thai toy factory fire

BANGKOK, May 11: The death toll in the fire that ravaged a toy factory on the outskirts of Bangkok rose today to 210, according to officials at the Interior Ministry, reports AFP.

Among them 188 had been determined as women, 14 as men. The sex of the other eight could not be identified as they were burnt beyond recognition, officials said.

The toll, they said, was likely to rise further as rescue operations were continuing after dusk, more than 24 hours after fire swept the complex Monday afternoon while some 4,000 employees, many of them women, were at work.

An employee of the factory said on radio Monday night that the fire was believed to have started on the ground floor of the factory from an electrical short circuit, which set fire to nylon fabric and other synthetic materials and

quickly spread to the floors above.

According to rescue workers, most of the 4000 workers managed to flee but as many as 200 were believed to be trapped inside the buildings when they collapsed.

Reuter adds: Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai visited the site on Monday night and said investigators had told him 1,600 workers might have been in the building when it burst into flames late in the afternoon.

The factory compound on the outskirts of Bangkok was made up of four buildings, each of four-storeys linked by passageways.

Workers said there were no windows on the top floors of the buildings and no fire escapes on the two floors below. There were two exits on the ground floor of each building, factory security man Kanika Kamcha told Reuters.

Govt employees' strike paralyses Kashmir

NEW DELHI, May 11: A strike called by government employees Monday paralysed Kashmir, where an Indian security officer and four Muslim militants were killed in continuing violence, the Press Trust of India (PTI) reported, reports AFP.

Shops and businesses were shut and all vehicles went off the roads in response to the shutdown called by the powerful Jammu and Kashmir Employees and Workers Confederation, the news agency said.

The confederation was protesting the state of terrorism by Indian security forces in Kashmir, as the state government offices were shifted from the winter capital Jammu to the summer capital Srinagar under tight security.

Civil servants turned up for work Monday, officials said, and life was crippled in Srinagar city and other parts of the Kashmir valley.

Security forces shot dead four militants in three separate gunbattles in Kashmir overnight Sunday, while one of two security personnel wounded by Muslim gunmen elsewhere died in hospital, PTI said.

Also Monday, the first batch of 130 women joined the Kashmir police, and a senior officer urged them to take on Muslim militants campaigning to secede the only Muslim-majority states from India, PTI said.

Two gunmen of Bombay blasts mastermind shot dead

NEW DELHI, May 11: Bombay police have shot dead two gunmen of a Dubai-based Indian ganglord suspected to be the mastermind behind the March bombings which left 300 people dead in the western Indian city, reports AFP.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) identified the slain gangsters as Dinesh Pujari and Ravi Sorate and said they died in a Monday night gunbattle near a sports stadium in Bombay's upscale Juhu residential district.

The two gunmen refused to stop at a security checkpoint and fired on the police when challenged, the news agency said. The officers managing the post returned fire, killing the two on the spot.

PTI said the pair were wanted for an unspecified number of murders in Bombay, India's financial hub, and elsewhere.

Govt conspiring to destroy jute industry: Menon

The Bangladesh Workers Party general secretary Rashed Khan Menon, MP, in a statement Tuesday, said that the government, conniving with the Indian lobby of the World Bank, was engaged in a conspiracy to destroy the country's jute and jute industries.

Termed the jute minister's proposal for a minimum national wage in accordance with the Wage and Productivity Commission report "a bluff," the Workers Party leader said that the minister's remarks on the labour strike were "unconstitutional".

Menon accused the government of breaching the agreement with the workers and demanded government accept the charter of demands of the workers.

Yeltsin sacks his security chief

MOSCOW, May 11: President Boris Yeltsin forged ahead with a government shakeup Tuesday by dismissing the chief of his powerful Security Council, part of the effort to give more authority to radical reforms, reports AP.

The Midnight File

UN won't recognise referendum in Bosnia

UNITED NATIONS, May 11: UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali said today the referendum on the peace plan for Bosnia-Herzegovina being organized by Bosnia's Serbs has no validity and would not be recognised by the United Nations, reports AFP.

Iraq says sanctions claim 250,000 lives

NICOSIA, May 11: A member of Iraq's ruling council said Tuesday that 150,000 Iraqi adults and 100,000 children have died as a result of UN economic sanctions. Vice President Taha Mohiaddin Marouf presented the figures at the National Conference for the Iraqi Child in Baghdad, the Iraqi News Agency said in a report monitored in Nicosia, reports AP.

Turkey, Russian sign military accord

ANKARA (Turkey), May 11: Turkey and Russia, which once faced off in rival blocs, on Tuesday agreed to cooperate in military education and the defense industry. Turkish Defense Minister Nevzat Ayaz, who signed the agreement with his Russian counterpart Pavel Grachev, said that the agreement would enable the two nations to get familiar with each other's military abilities, according to Anatolia agency, reports AP.

JS remains busy

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pressing for implementation of a "so-called verdict passed by an extra-constitutional court" called *Gana adalat*.

The AL-led opposition observed that any citizen of the country had the right to organise rallies and bring out processions to press demands.

To back the argument, the opposition referred to Articles 36 and 37 of the constitution.

Countering the opposition claim, the Treasury Bench, referring to the same provisions of the constitution, argued that it was illegal to try to hold any rally which was previously banned by the government to protect public interest and restore discipline.

The treasury bench MPs also argued that the said articles of the constitution allowed the citizens only to hold peaceful rallies. The rallies held by the Nirmul Committee were in no way peaceful, they claimed.

Salauddin Yusuf of the AL, while accusing the government of violating the constitution, argued that the rallies which came under police attack had not been banned by the government earlier.

Home Minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, while refuting the charge, said that the organisers of the Nirmul Committee had been verbally requested not to hold the gatherings.

Matia Chowdhury of the AL observed that the police atrocities against the Nirmul Committee rally on the nation's Independence Day, March 26, could only be explained by the ruling party's political intimacy with the Jamaat that had actively opposed the country's War of Liberation in 1971.

In a bid to refute Matia's statement, Wing Commander Hamidullah of the BNP told the House that the Nirmul Committee was patently created to disturb the democratically-elected government.

"Why did these Nirmul Committee personalities kept mum when Sheikh Mujibur Rahman had forgiven even the members of the war-time cabinet of governor Abdul Malek who resorted to inhuman tortures against the freedom-loving people of the country?" the BNP MP asked.

Colonel (ret'd) Akbar Hossain of the BNP, however, agreed to the spirit of the Nirmul Committee's attempt to try Golam Azam as a war criminal but differed sharply

PM, AL

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The BEA suggested that the SKOP leaders should now go back to their respective constituents and involve themselves in collective bargaining at the sectoral level.

"The BEA is committed to cooperating in all ways to help find mutually acceptable minimum wages at sectoral levels," the statement said.

It also reiterated the BEA's stand on linking wages to productivity.

The statement added that fixation of wage including national minimum wages through wages commissions is being discarded everywhere in the world, including the neighbouring countries.

The BEA also complimented many trade union leaders and workers for appreciating the long-term interests of the economy and not forcing issues for sectional interests.

ADP allocation

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The transport sector will get the second highest allocation of Tk 1249.46 crore with Tk 778.90 crore in project aid.

The outlay for agriculture is stipulated at Tk 696.5 crore, rural development Tk 485.04 crore, education Tk 901.03 crore, health Tk 320.35 crore and water resources Tk 1088.07 crore.

First day of strike

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spondent reports that production at all the large industrial units including the Adamjee Jute Mills, the Chittaranjan Cotton Mills, and the Luxminarayana Cotton Mills at Narayanganj, Rupganj and Fatullah remained closed.

However, workers joined their duties at some export-oriented garments units and worked behind closed doors.

Chittagong

Our staff correspondent writes from Chittagong: most of the mills and factories there remained shut down during the strike, paralysing production.

The worst affected industrial belts in Chittagong included Nasirabad, Kalurghat, Patenga and Shitakunda where hundreds of mills and factories remained closed because of the strike.

But administration sources claimed that some industries owned by the public sector corporations in the Sitakunda belt, some 30 miles from the city, functioned as usual.

Local road transport operated normally while the inter-district buses did not ply.

No violence was reported from Chittagong on the first day of the labour strike.

Khulna

Our Staff Correspondent in Khulna says that partial response came from the workers.

Except some private industrial units, almost all the mills and factories functioned as usual.

The Khulna newspaper factory and the Khulna shipyard operated in full three shifts.

Production remained suspended in most jute mills of Khulna.

The Khulna unit of the SKOP organised a rally at Khalishpur Tuesday afternoon and brought out a procession.

The law enforcing agencies deployed additional forces in different areas of the Khulna and Khalishpur industrial regions.

Other districts

SKOP leaders in Dhaka claimed that their three-day programme was being successfully observed also at Savar, Ghorasal and in Rajshahi, Kushtia, Mymensingh, Bogra and Panchagarh districts.

They said that 62 of the 66 public and private sector jute mills remained shut down. However, the SKOP leaders admitted that work continued at the United Meghna Chandpur Jute Mills at Narsingdi, the Monwar Jute Mills at Kanchpur, the Bangladesh Jute Mills at Ghorasal and the Bawa Jute Mills at Narayanganj.

Production at all the 16 sugar mills and the steel factories remained suspended, they said.

The SKOP leaders said that except the Bengal Textile Mills in Jessore, the Kurigram Textile Mills, the Darwani Textile Mills at Nilphamari and the Dinajpur Textile Mills, the strike was enforced at all the rest 42 textile units under the BTMC.

However, the official BSS news agency reported that production went on in full-

swing at eight textile mills under the BTMC on the first day of the work stoppage.

The mills were: Bengal Textile Mills at Jessore, Darwani Textile Mills and Nilphamari, Khulna Textile Mills, Khulna, RR Textile Mills at Chittagong, Rangamati Textile Mills at Rangamati, Magura Textile Mills at Magura and Dost Textile Mills at Noakhali.

Janata Bank official, 7 others charged with corruption

The Anti-Corruption Bureau yesterday filed a case with Motijheel police station against eight persons including an Assistant General Manager of Janata Bank for allegedly smuggling out 1,88,296.23 US dollars and misappropriation of Taka 79,09,757 of the bank till April 4, an official handout said, reports BSS.

According to the statement of the case, the accused smuggled out the foreign exchange in the name of fictitious imports by opening letters of credit with Janata Bank, Bangabandhu Road corporate branch, Narayanganj and misappropriated Taka 79,09,757.

The accused are S M Anwar, owner of Messrs Bangladesh Optical Industries, Abdul Karim Khan, Assistant General Manager of Janata Bank, Bangabandhu Road corporate branch, Narayanganj, Senior Principal Officer Shamsul Islam, officer Liakat Hossain, Janata Bank, local office branch, Dhaka, Principal Officer Alauddin Ahmed, Senior Principal Officer Syed Shahtur Rahman, Senior Principal officer AB Siddiqui Rahman and indentor Hafizul Islam Chowdhury, owner, Messrs Chowdhury Agency.

HC questions

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Akhতারuzzaman Babu had earlier filed an application for anticipatory bail before a High Court Division Bench. After hearing, the bench refused to allow his prayer for anticipatory bail with a verbal direction to appear before the proper court.

Instead of appearing before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka he surrendered and appeared before the Sessions Judge, Nasiruddin Ahmed who accepted his surrender and granted him ad-interim bail.

Deputy Attorney General AFM Shahid, Assistant Attorney General AKM Shamsul Karim and Motiul Islam appeared on behalf of the state.

Assets released

Our Court Correspondent adds: Meanwhile, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate Tuesday ordered release of the frozen accounts and return of all seized property of Akhtaruzzaman Chowdhury Babu.

Earlier, Magistrate Shahid-uddin Ahmed, on April 18, had ordered the freezing of all his bank accounts and confiscation of his property on the plea that Babu was an absconder.

FBCCI chief hails govt's firmness

By Staff Correspondent

The president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), Mahbubur Rahman, in a statement Tuesday, hailed the firm stand of the government as well as major political parties on the SKOP's demand for national minimum wages.

Rahman said the SKOP's demands for a 'across-the-board' wage hike would cause strains on the overall economy, besides having an adverse impact on the investment climate.

Expressing concern at the latest developments on the labour front, the FBCCI president said, "The recourse to countrywide strike on a demand like enforcement of national minimum wages for public sector employees and workers, having a vital bearing on the overall wage-setting process in the country, is totally illogical and unjustified. This is more so, because wages cannot be fixed arbitrarily at the dictates of any unauthorised body without considering the productivity factor and the paying capacity of the units in each specific industrial sector. Also, the decision of disinvestment of public sector enterprises cannot be left to the choice of any vested interests."

"Reports that the SKOP leaders have not accepted the proposal for sector-wise minimum wages, and are pressing for a minimum national wage structure only reflect how the hard economic realities are ignored by them," Rahman said.

He said wage hikes ignoring the economic realities of the country and without a linkage to productivity would cripple the economy.

"Such hikes will have wider repercussions on the private sector", the FBCCI chief said.

He reiterated that the wage hike issue should be determined in normal course through tripartite consultations and adherence to economic logic.

"We would call upon the government to continue its firmness matching its commitments to restore discipline in the overall economy and not encourage terror tactics or to give in to any unjust demands," Mahbubur Rahman said.

He also requested all concerned not to politicise the wages issue and not to practice expediency to the detriment of national economic interests.

Suharto tells NAM meet New partnership to rid world of econ disarray



Police guarding the Chand Textile Mills in Shyampur near the capital on the first day of the 72-hour SKOP shutdown yesterday.

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NUSA DUA (Indonesia), May 11: Indonesian President Suharto called for a new global partnership today to lift the world out of its current economic disarray, reports AFP.

He told a Non-Aligned Movement meeting here that it has become "abundantly clear to all that most of the problems we face today are global in nature and cannot be solved through short term relief measures or through piecemeal reforms."

Several NAM delegates sharply criticised the United Nations and other international organisations for failing to correct global economic imbalances and plan to include their comments in a final draft communiqué.

The three-day meeting of the 37-member NAM's Standing Ministerial Committee (SMC) for economic cooperation opened after observing a minute's silence for the late Sri Lankan President Ranasinghe Premadasa assassinated in a bomb blast earlier this month.

Suharto told the meeting that while the South needed

Govt conspiring to destroy jute industry: Menon

The North to provide a more conducive external environment for development, the North would find it difficult to sustain economic growth without stability and adequate development in the South.

Should the South lose its purchasing power, the North would also lose a vast and vital market, said Suharto, calling for a successful and balanced conclusion to the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations.

He said it was common sense for both sides to recognise their interdependence and come together to fashion a joint strategy in dealing with the formidable challenges of this critical decade.

As current NAM Chairman, Suharto has been lobbying to address leaders of the Group of Seven industrialised nations when they meet for their summit in Tokyo in July.

He has not been invited to attend although several G-7 countries have offered to hold bilateral meetings. The G-7 groups — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States.

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