

Dudayev regrets failure to protect Chechens

MOSCOW, Jan 24: Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudayev today expressed regret he had not been able to protect his people from Russian forces, Ekho Moskva radio reported, says Reuter.

The independent radio station, which said it reached Dudayev by telephone in the early hours today, quoted him as saying: "My heart aches for those destitute whom I could not defend."

Dudayev, whose forces in the Chechen capital Grozny have been pushed back by Russian troops to south of the Sunzha River dividing the city, denied a Russian military victory was near.

The Russian troops do not control anything. They have simply massed in various places and are completely surrounded," he said defiantly.

He added that the only thing that stopped the Chechens striking at Russian forces more fiercely was the presence of civilians nearby. Dudayev asserted 100 Russian servicemen were being killed for every one of his fighters.

He said added that, since there were no reports of Chechen captives, it was clear the Russians were not taking prisoners.

"Yet in this situation we are being asked to give back to Russian mothers their cap-



Smoke from a hand bomb, allegedly hurled by Opposition activists enforcing yesterday's half-day hartal in the city, which exploded in front of the Awlad Hossain Market near Farm Gate as Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia's motorcade was passing through in the morning. —Star photo

Hartal in city

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ment which she inaugurated, a crude home-made bomb exploded as the vehicles passed by.

Begum Zia went to the conference venue amid tight security as Opposition activists put up strong pickets in the Farm Gate area.

Witnesses said Opposition political workers gathered in the area since early morning and demonstrated there, led by Awami League leaders Matia Chowdhury and Advocate Sahara Khatun.

At about 10 am, police guarding the area asked a procession to leave the VIP road for allowing the Prime Minister's motorcade to pass towards Sonargaon Hotel.

At one stage, an altercation started between the police and the activists, which led to police chasing the activists who were baiting them.

Police then started beating up some of the activists, when Matia Chowdhury and Sahara Khatun were injured.

Sahara Khatun suffered a serious blow on one of her knees and was admitted to a nearby private clinic.

Matia Chowdhury was picked up and taken to the Tejaon police station.

Two other female activists belonging to the pro-Awami League Chhatra League — Saima and Dana — were also taken into police custody. All of them were later released.

Police lobbed tear gas shells to disperse the mob.

Later, when the PM's motorcade was returning from Sonargaon Hotel, a bomb exploded near the car carrying her.

Everyone in the area, from Farm Gate to the Bijoy Sarani crossing, panicked, running helter skelter. Police resorted to baton-charge and in the melee that ensued, even some innocent bystanders, men and women, were beaten up.

Bombs were also set off near the GPO crossing and nearby Golap Shah Mazar, and in Kauran Bazar, Khilgaon, Asad Gate, Green Road and Bijoy Nagar areas.

During the early part of the hartal hours, vehicles except rickshaws, remained off the streets. From noon onwards more and more vehicles ventured out.

In the morning, a few double-decker buses came out on the streets under police protection but later those were withdrawn.

Educational institutions, shops and private offices remained closed while banks and financial institutions worked behind closed doors.

Hartal supporters brought out small processions in different parts of the city.

Our Dhaka Medical College Correspondent said four people were admitted to the DMCH with splinter and shrapnel injuries.

After the hartal hours, the Chhatra League, Jatya Party and Jatya Juba Samaj held separate rallies in front of the Jatya Press Club.

Clinton orders freeze on assets of 12 ME groups

WASHINGTON, Jan 24: President Bill Clinton has ordered a freeze on the US assets of 12 Middle East groups described as terrorist organisations, the White House said today, reports Reuter.

White House spokesman Mike McCurry said Clinton had signed an executive order to block the assets in the United States of certain terrorist organisations that threaten to disrupt the peace process in the Middle East.

The groups include Hamas, Hizbollah, Islamic Jihad, Abu Nidal, Black September, the Fatah Revolutionary Council, Kach, the Palestine Liberation Front, and the Islamic Group, McCurry said. He did not name the others, but said there would be more information released later today.

Dhaka offers best deal

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objective is identical — to harness the potentials of our people." The Prime Minister said: "Some people say that Bangladesh is a small country, but we consider it to be a big country of 120 million people. Its strategic location adds to its importance in the realm of trade and investment."

Bangladesh once was a legend of wealth and prosperity and merchant ships used to sail abroad for trading but colonial exploitations led to the collapse of the economy and industry of this country, she recalled.

"Today we are striving to retrace that path and recapture the lost glory. Our principal asset in this endeavour is our people," Begum Zia said adding that her government has been making all efforts to develop human resources.

She mentioned that the previous government had spent 10 to 12 per cent of the annual development expenditure for human resource development while the present government increased it to 28 per cent of total development allocation.

Listing her government's steps to ensure education, primary health care, development of women and children, supply of pure drinking water and priority to social welfare sectors, Begum Zia said: "Our achievements in these fields have exceeded our targets."

Due to the correct measures taken by the present government, she said people have already started getting positive results of socio-economic development programmes.

"Our infrastructure like electricity, telecommunication, ports and highways are being developed fast. Our goal is to reap the benefits of the global free market as we enter the 21st century," the Prime Minister said.

The conference was sponsored by six foreign and 14 local companies. The foreign companies are: Citicorp, Crosby Securities, Global Emerging Markets, Spith New Court (East Asia) Ltd, UBS Securities (East Asia) Ltd, and W I Carr.

The local sponsors are the Apex Tannery Group, AB Bank, BGMEA, the Dhaka Stock Exchange, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Karnaphuli Fertilizer Company, Rupali Bank, Sonali Bank, BSR, the Investment Corporation of Bangladesh, the Pacific Group of Companies and Square Pharmaceuticals.

"We have a fast expanding private sector. Side by side, there is a shrinking but supportive public sector. Their

"This dynamism in the country's economy is a consequence of the restoration of democratic order in Bangladesh," she said. "Democracy is a unique system which promotes efficiency, creativity and blossoming of the intellect."

In order to achieve economic transformation, all segments of society must be active and willing partners, the Prime Minister said. The government is fully aware of this reality, she added.

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Call for hartal in Sylhet Jan 28

From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Jan 24: A day-long hartal has been called in the town on January 28 protesting 'voting irregularities' and failure of the administration to provide security in centres in Sunday's local elections.

Babruil Hossain Babul, an independent candidate called the hartal at a public meeting held this afternoon at the Court-Point area of the town.

Restaurant ransacked

By Staff Correspondent
A group of young men stormed into a restaurant, ransacked it and beat up its staff in the city's Dhanmondi area yesterday evening.

Witnesses said, an armed gang of about 25 youths — some of whom were refused free-entertainment in the Khai Khai Parlour at Dhanmondi, Road No-5, in the afternoon — carried out the raid at 6:30 pm.

The restaurant staff held one identified as Jahangir Alam of Kathal Bagan and handed over him to the Dhanmondi police.

One of the owners of the restaurant said that the gunmen fired two shots and exploded crackers while they were fleeing the scene. But none was injured in the incident.

Sajeedur Rahman, the owner of the restaurant lodged a case with the Dhanmondi police.

Barricade causes Tk 3 cr loss: BR

The railway department sustained a loss of Tk three crore due to the three days of road-rail barricade programme enforced countrywide by jute and textile mill workers, said a press release yesterday, reports UNB.

On the first day of the programme on Sunday, it said, windowpanes, shutters and engines of inter-city trains Simanta Express and Prabhati Express were damaged, and Tejgaon and Pahartali stations ransacked. The loss was estimated at Tk two lakh.

Ghorasal Plag station was attacked on the second day causing loss of property worth Tk 2.06 crore. Some 220 sleepers and 1,800 feet of railway track near the station were uprooted and its control panel, generator and point machine damaged.

Besides, the Railway incurred huge loss by returning money to the passengers who bought tickets but could not travel due to the barricade programme, the press release said.

The Midnight File

Soldiers occupy Congress building in El Salvador

SAN SALVADOR, Jan 24: About 200 demobilised soldiers occupied El Salvador's Congress building here today, demanding back pay owed by the government, various sources said. In a related incident, some 100 other soldiers took over the Armed Forces Institute for Social Benefit, reports AFP.

Fresh efforts for peace in Bosnia

SARAJEVO, Jan 24: International negotiators, hoping to capitalise on recent breakthroughs in United Nations confidence-building efforts, converged on Bosnia on Tuesday to persuade the country's warring parties to resume peace talks. A fragile four-month truce, which took effect on January 1 and which is generally holding everywhere apart from the Bihać pocket in northwestern Bosnia, gave new impetus to the mission from the United States, Russia, Germany, Britain and France, reports Reuter.

1 killed, 20 hurt in Natore road accident

From Our Correspondent
NATORE, Jan 24: One person was killed and at least 20 others were injured in a road accident at Modapara here today.

The mishap took place as a passenger bus on the Gurdaspur-Ahmadpur route overturned and fell into a roadside ditch when a speeding truck tried to overtake the bus at Modapara under Baraigram thana at 11 am today.

Mokhles, 25, a passenger of the ill-fated bus died on way to hospital while 20 other injured passengers were admitted to local thana health complex.

The driver of the bus managed to flee the accident spot. A case was registered with Baraigram police.

Hasina may chair

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Addressing a plenary session of the conference along with Awami League leader Tofael Ahmed yesterday, the JP leader suggested that the AL chief, as the leader of the largest opposition party, should have been invited to chair the closing session to emphasise the commitment to growth of all major political parties in the country.

Hasina

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The government has not kept its commitments to professionals, workers and students.

Presided over by city AL Vice President, Reazuddin Ahmed, the rally was also addressed by city unit leaders Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Akhtarul Alam.

The rally was followed by a procession which paraded some city streets chanting slogans in support of the call for hartal today.

3 bodies

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Motihsheel Police Station for further interrogation.

Sabujbag police also recovered the body of an unidentified man aged about 24 near the Banashri Apartment project at Rampura yesterday morning.

Police believed it was a case of homicide.

"His eyes were gouged out and the body carried several marks of cuts and bruises," said a police officer.

Another unidentified man in his 20s died after he was run over by a speeding truck near the IPGMR Hospital at Shahbag around 4 in the afternoon.

Railway

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ADB proposal for reforms is now being considered by the government.

"BR still has a tremendous potential in the transport sector. Without major improvements in the transport sector, economic growth could be slowed. Our cities and highways are already gridlocked by traffic jams, and there is growing concern about what more roads and traffic will do to our environment," a source concerned noted.

Trains have many natural advantages over other forms of transport. They consume less energy than cars and lorries, cause less pollution, and take less space than road transports. Above all, they can be fast.

An increasing number of Asian countries including China, Thailand, South Korea, Vietnam are seeking foreign assistance to improve their railways. In the developing countries, foreign investors are often frustrated by a limited network of pot-holed roads and creaking railway tracks.

Unlimited prospects lie before BR in a country with 120 million people who crave for better transportation.

Arjun Singh

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government.

Even if the party does not split, Rao could lose more support if it does badly in the state elections, leaving Singh in a position to unseat him.

Congress lost three of the four states where elections were held late last year, and Singh blamed the rout on Rao's lack of charisma and the public perception that his economic reforms were hurting the poor.

But Rao dismissed these charges. "I do not accept the view that the vote is a verdict against the economic reforms," he told Press Trust of India in an interview on Tuesday.

Singh, who was addressing meetings in the southern city of Madras, was told about his suspension by reporters.

"I know that I have done nothing against the Congress Party," he said.

Rao indicated earlier Tuesday that he might take action against Singh when he told a party meeting that "discipline in the Congress will have to be enforced when somebody crosses the limit."

Gangsters

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none came to lodge any complaint.

Earlier, namaj-e-janaza of Sabir was held at Nabiganj Eidgah Maidan this morning.

In another incident, eight shops were gutted and 17 damaged at the yarn market at Tanbazar park early today. Local people said the fire might have originated from an electric short circuit. Some youths looted the shop soon after the fire engulfed the whole yarn market, they alleged.

Firemen from Mondalpara and Hajiganj fire stations rushed to spot and brought the fire under control.

But it took them two hours. A case was registered with Narayanganj police in this connection.

Tofael, Moudud at confce

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economic situation, the AL adopted the free market economic policy as "most suitable for our country."

The AL leader said political stability for economic development can be ensured through consensus among all major political parties. "There must be a stable set of economic policies formulated after a proper debate in Parliament."

If his party comes to power, Tofael said, it would ensure robust, bold and firm governance to create an enabling investment environment, fostering a climate of trust that would allow the private sector to flourish without being subjected to too much regulation. "We intend to vigorously promote foreign direct investment."

He also emphasised having a more appropriate labour policy to protect the interests of the workers.

"I hope that you go back with increased understanding of the investment opportunities available in Bangladesh," Tofael told the 200 or so foreign investors attending the conference.



Tofael Ahmed any hartals in future if the ruling BNP also provides a similar undertaking that it will not call hartals when it is in the Opposition.

"We cannot afford to miss this bus for attracting foreign investments, because Bangladesh has much to offer to the foreign investors," he added.

Moudud also referred to some 28 million-strong capable workforce, a large number of skilled managerial personnel and huge untapped natural resources in the country.

He underscored the need for removing bureaucratic and legal complexities in financial and social sectors that are creating obstacles in foreign and local investment.

"The dead laws are not suitable to adjust or facilitate investment in a changed economic scenario. These should be reformed," he said.

We wish Bangladesh Investment Conference a success.

Let it contribute to the rapid progress of Bangladesh, the Emerging Tiger of Asia.

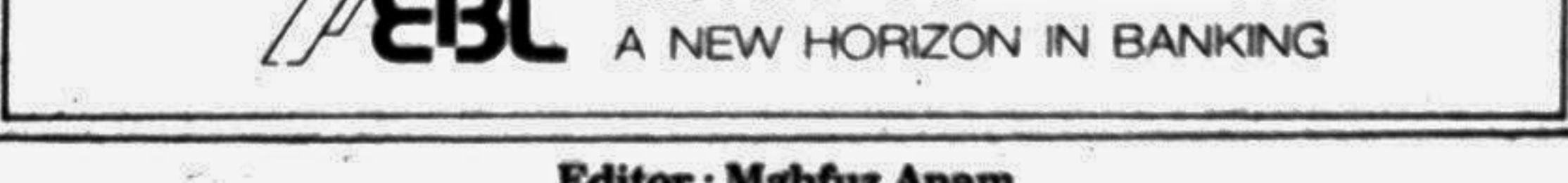


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