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Hartal: 100 hurt in clashes

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away. Later, the BNP activists made several attempts to hold a rally there, but police repeatedly chased them away. At one stage, police lobbed tear gas shells at the BNP gathering and Habib, who was on duty there, was hit.

The government announced price hike of petroleum products by upto 61 per cent on Tuesday last and BNP called the hartal protesting this. Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikkaya Jote, Jatiya Party (M-Z) and Jatiya Ganatantrik Party (JAGPA) supported the hartal. Plain clothes police picked up BNP leader Anwar Zahid and JAGPA chief Shaful Alam Pradhan on Saturday night.

The hartal paralysed normal life across the country. All modes of public and private transports, barring a small number of rickshaws were off the roads. Shops and business establishments, banks and educational institutions remained closed, while attendance in the government offices was thin during the hartal hours. There was no transaction in the foreign exchange market and no trading took place on the floors of Dhaka and Chittagong Stock Exchanges.

Over 6000 police and BDR personnel, in riot gear, were deployed on the streets of the city. Helmeted police patrolled the city areas as groups of BNP activists paraded the streets shouting anti-government slogans.

Former home minister and BNP leader Abdul Matin Chowdhury and his party colleagues were injured during a clash between hartal supporters and ruling Awami League activists near AL office at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city at about 9:00 am. The former minister was admitted to a private clinic.

In the morning, groups of BNP activists were seen bringing out processions that chanted anti-government slogans, in almost all areas of the city. According to BNP sources, the party activists picked at more than 70 points in the city. Supporters of the hartal were seen checking the identity of journalists on duty. They also demanded some rickshaws at certain places.

Police charged a big procession of BNP student front, Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, in front of the Shishu Park in the city, leaving at least 20 injured. Police also lobbed tear gas shells on the procession and picked up some JCD activists from the spot.

A news agency report said 43 activists of BNP were arrested from different parts of the city during hartal hours. Of the arrested, 31 were accused of various charges including violent acts and disrupting public life and rest of them were arrested on suspicion.

A press release issued by the police headquarters, however, said 40 people were arrested and eight cases were registered. Police lobbed 37 rounds of tear gas shells and fired three rounds of rubber bullets. Eleven persons including five policemen received treatment at the DMCH, it added.

Kidnappers free businessman

CHITTAGONG, Aug 24: A kidnapped businessman was freed and returned to his residence on Saturday night after six hours, police said, reports BSS.

Abdus Salam, who returned from Middle East a few days ago, was kidnapped by a gang of armed terrorists from Bahar signal under Chandganj thana at 6 pm on Saturday.

The victim returned to his residence at around 12 midnight Saturday night, the source said.

Indo-Bangla border confce begins today

A four-day border conference between Bangladesh and India begins in Calcutta today, reports UNB.

Deputy Director General of BDR Brig Mohammad Abdur Rab will lead an eight-member Bangladesh delegation at the conference.

Autorickshaw

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rejected the government's 'illegal decision' to raise the petroleum prices by observing the hartal spontaneously.

Rejecting the Energy Minister's statement that common people would not be affected due to the refuelled fuel prices, they said the commoners were suffering due to the increased transport cost and price hike of essentials as a result of high fuel price.

The autorickshaw drivers said they will have to spend Tk 60 more daily as fuel cost due to the price hike of petrol.

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BNP out to disrupt stability: Zillur

Ruling Awami League general secretary Zillur Rahman said BNP in an attempt to disrupt the anti-liberation forces was out to create chaos and disrupt stability and development process, reports UNB.

"Begum Zia is now dreaming a bad dream of capturing power," he said reacting to the countrywide hartal enforced by the main opposition party, backed by some Islamic groups. On the current political situation, Zillur said BNP chief Begum Zia had taken over the leadership of fundamentalists and anti-liberation forces to oust the elected government.

"This (BNP) is a party without political culture and background. Awami League had been in the opposition for 21 years, but BNP has become so upset only in six months that it

wants to get back power by any means," he said.

Criticising BNP for calling hartals on lame excuses, Zillur, also the LGED Minister, said the government was compelled to raise the prices of petroleum in keeping with international market.

Despite the enhanced prices of petroleum products, he told UNB, the government will still have to funnel crores of taka in subsidy to this sector.

"The prices were raised not to protect the interest of an individual, nor a party, rather to protect the interest of the country," he said.

The LGED Minister observed the oil price hike would not affect the general people as diesel and kerosene prices were increased nominally.

India forces US to cancel patent on turmeric

NEW DELHI, Aug 24: India has got the United States government to cancel a patent given to two scientists to use turmeric for healing wounds, saying it has been practised in the country for centuries, newspapers reported Sunday, reports AP.

The US Patent and Trademark Office in Washington last week rejected an appeal by the two scientists after it cancelled the patent in February, newspapers quoted an Indian official as saying.

Raghu Nath Mashelkar, Director-general of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research, the Indian government's science policy body that filed a review petition before the patent office this year, hailed the decision as protecting traditional knowledge.

He said Saturday that it is an emotive issue in developing countries which see multinational companies patenting drugs used for centuries by the people.

This year, two researchers at the University of Mississippi at Jackson, received a patent for applying turmeric powder to heal wounds, used in India for thousands of years, according to Mashelkar.

His office provided scientific papers to show that the use of the spice for medical purposes had been documented centuries ago.

A report from the Rajshahi district police said a clash between BNP's student front Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal and Pro-Awami League Chhatra League left seven JCD men injured.

Another report from Rajshahi adds: The dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed in Rajshahi district peacefully, barring a clash at Charchat thana headquarters that left at least nine people injured.

Police said the clash at Charchat Bazar occurred when the BNP-backed pickets resisted a move by the anti-hartal Awami League supporters to ply tempo and autorickshaws in the area at about 2:30 pm.

A report from Comilla says, sporadic clashes between AL and BNP activists left 10 people injured during the hartal hours. Another report from Kurigram adds, pro-hartal activists clashed with their rivals leaving seven people, including a police officer, injured.

Police and witnesses said activists of BNP and Awami League chased and clashed with each other in Ulipur area during the hartal hours.

Rajuk

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The lifts in the building remained inoperative as operators did not turn up. On the first floor, only one employee was seen at the Estate wing. The building plan approval and the land wings had only three people engaged in personal work. The Rajuk Secretary was however, present at his office.

On the second floor, none turned up at the Accounts, while Estate and Administration wings on the same floor looked deserted. Two officials were seen at the otherwise busy Law wing. On the third, fourth and fifth floors and in the annex building, no officials were found in the offices. Electric fans and lights were, however, seen turned on in the empty rooms of the building.

A few visitors, who arrived at the building during the hartal, were seen walking away later.

ADB to send team

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"He specially appreciated the reform schemes and the difficult decisions taken by the government to adjust with the market economy," he said. He mentioned the measures like adjustment of fuel and fertiliser prices and power tariff.

The government's firm steps towards privatisation and banking sector reform also earned appreciation from the ADB president, the minister pointed out.

Progress of the ongoing ADB-funded projects was also discussed and "it is expected that the ADB assistance would reach 400 million US dollars this year," Kibria told newsmen.

After discussion on the Ganges barrage project, he said, the Bank president expressed his readiness to send a mission to Bangladesh for the technical and economic feasibility study of the project.

The government is planning to construct a barrage over the river Padma for the optimum use of the water of Ganges following last year's long-term water-sharing treaty with India.

The Indian government argued that anything that is prior knowledge cannot be patented.

Turmeric, a dried root of a plant that is related to the ginger, is used as a flavoring agent by millions of Indians. It is also used extensively in the country to cure everything from sore throats to intestinal disorders.

The protests grew after American companies had earlier patented the use of neem as pesticide. Neem has been used for centuries in India in agriculture and in medicine.

Voluntary groups in India have been campaigning against foreign companies that profit by making medicines out of plants growing in India, saying the country's biological wealth is being plundered.

President's Award Fund (Amend) Bill discussed

A meeting of the Jatiya Sangsad special committee on bill scrutiny was held at Sangsad Bhavan yesterday with its chairman Mohammad Rahmat Ali in the chair, reports UNB.

The meeting discussed 'The President's Award Fund (Amendment) Bill, 1997' which was submitted before the committee and sent for its scrutiny earlier.

The bill was placed in Parliament with a view to reintroducing the 'Bangabandhu Award' for outstanding contributions in the field of agriculture.

Committee members, Food and Agriculture Minister Begum Akhter Chowdhury, Forest and Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Col (ret'd) Shaukat Ali attended the meeting.

Mamata urges Gujral to honour Bahadur Shah

CALCUTTA, Aug 24: Trinamul Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, MP, on Saturday urged Indian Prime Minister, I.K. Gujral to name any institution of national importance after the last Moghul Emperor, Bahadur Shah Zafar, on the 50th anniversary of independence, reports PTI.

In a letter to the Prime Minister, Banerjee suggested that the posts and telegraph department be asked to issue a special commemorative postal stamp as a tribute to the last Moghul Emperor who was arrested and deported to Ranigunj by the British rulers during the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny.

"I strongly feel that while celebrating 50th year of our independence, we should not forget and overlook the sacrifice of those who had suffered due to atrocities let loose by the British troops to crush Sepoy Mutiny during 1857-59", she said.

Banerjee regretted that some of the prominent leaders, responsible for revolt against the British empire during 1857-59, were not receiving deserving attention of the authorities on the golden jubilee year of independence.



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Americans in KSA urged to be on guard against terrorist attacks

RIYADH, Aug 24: The US embassy in Riyadh has issued a warning to the 40,000 Americans living in Saudi Arabia to be on their guard for new terrorist attacks, reports AFP.

"The American embassy wishes to remind Americans in Saudi Arabia that it continues to receive reports indicating possible surveillance or probes of US military and government facilities suggesting that the planning for terrorist actions against US interests in Saudi Arabia continues unabated," the embassy said in a recorded telephone message.

"We urge Americans to maintain the highest level of vigilance and alert. We strongly encourage them to exercise caution, to reduce travel within the kingdom and report any suspect activity," it said.

It also advised US nationals to be aware of letters or parcels from unknown senders.

Americans in Saudi Arabia have been targeted by two bomb attacks since 1995, which have been claimed by shadowy groups calling on US troops to leave the Gulf.

In November, 1995 five Americans and two Indians died in a car bomb attack on a US military training building in Riyadh.

In June 1996, a truck bomb exploded next to a military housing complex near Dhahran, eastern Saudi Arabia, killing 19 Americans.

After the bombing, US troops were moved to a high-security base in the desert south of Riyadh and the US embassy has regularly issued warnings

to its citizens in the kingdom. The reason for the new alert is unclear. The last warning came in March when the embassy was concerned at comments from Usama Bin Laden, a Saudi Islamist known to fund Arab militants, threatening Americans he described as "occupying" his country.

Ben Laden, who has been stripped of his Saudi nationality and lives in Afghanistan, called not only for US troops to leave Saudi Arabia, but also 40,000 civilians who work in the oil industry, hospitals, airports and US companies in the desert Kingdom.

There are an estimated 20,000 American troops deployed in the Middle East, including some 5,000 in Saudi Arabia.

Zahid, Prodhan sent to jail

By Staff Correspondent

The two opposition leaders who were arrested Saturday night were sent to the Dhaka Central Jail yesterday, according to official sources.

Anwar Zahid, a BNP leader, and Shaful Alam Pro-dhan, chief of JAGPA, were arrested from the city by plainclothes police men. They were arrested under Section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

They were produced before the chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court last evening. The bail petitions moved on their behalf were refused and the court also declined to grant them division in jail.

Both the bail prayers were moved by advocate Aminul Islam.

Infrastructure for transit to Nepal being built

PANCHAGARH, Aug 24: Nepal has requested Bangladesh to build necessary infrastructure at Bangabandhu border quickly to facilitate transport through the transit route, reports UNB.

The request was made on August 22 when Nepalese Ambassador to Bangladesh Lok Bahadur Srestha, First Secretary Jagadish Prasad Arai, and Consul-General to Calcutta Dip Pasnet visited the Bangabandhu border.

Customs officials of Bangladesh were present during the visit, preparatory to opening the Bangladesh-Nepal transit route.

Responding to the request, Bangladesh has taken initiative to open bank, godowns, and customs, insurance and immigration offices at Ban-glabandh before the opening of transit route on September 1.

Janmastomi

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Bangladesh is a land of religious harmony and amity, they said and expressed the hope that this trend would continue. They urged all to build a happy and prosperous country sinking all differences.

BNP chairperson and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Begum Khaleda Zia also felicitated the members of Hindu community.

In a message, Begum Zia said, members of all religions here perform their rites independently. The people have genuine respect for all religions, she said adding the mutual respect among the members of various religions has consolidated our national unity.

The day's programmes include Sree Sree Krishna Abahan, puja, recitation from the Geeta, Bhogues, Arati, procession, discussion and distribution of proshad in all Hindu shrines.

In observance of the day, the Mohanagar Sarbojanin Puja Committee and Central Janmastami Festival Committee have jointly chalked out a three-day programme. The programme includes "Geeta-jogama", Janmastami procession and discussion.

Geetajogama will be held at 8 am today while a colourful procession be brought out from the Dhakeswari Temple at 3 pm. Mayor Mohammad Hanif will inaugurate the procession.

Mahanagar Sarbojanin Puja Committee will also organise a discussion meeting on August 26 where Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad will be the chief guest.

A Geeta recitation and painting competition for children will also be arranged in the city today to mark the occasion.

Besides, some other Hindu organisations have organised a number of programmes, including Nagarkirtan, Geeta recitation, Sree Sree Bhagavatpath, Sree Krishna puja.

Sree Sree Geeta Sangha has chalked out an elaborate programme. The Sangha will arrange Mangalcharan, puja, recitation from Geeta and Bhagavat, Sree Krishna Bhogues, Arati and distribution of proshad.

Seminar foiled

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ditorium. A number of the audiences were also injured and a vanity bag was snatched from a woman during the attack.

The leaders of the Ainjibi Parishad escaped the attack as they were offering Maghreb prayers inside the Press Club.

Later, reassembling in the auditorium, the Ainjibi Parishad held a protest meeting condemning the heinous attack and blamed the pro-BNP terrorists for the incident.

Parishad president Meer Habibur Rahman presided over the meeting which was addressed by Awami League president member Dr Muhammad Selim MP, Advocate Sahara Khatun, Syed Rezaur Rahman, AFM Mezbahuddin, Altaf Hosain, Bashir Ahmed and Subrata Chowdhury.

They demanded legal action against the attackers and described the incident as part of the conspiracy by the anti-liberation forces to foil the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu.

UNB adds: Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan has denied that his party workers attacked the meeting on Bangabandhu.

"None of BNP men resorted to such acts," he told journalists when asked about the attack at a post-hartal press conference at Jatiya Press Club.

The BNP Secretary General also condemned the terrorist acts and said in a democratic set-up such activities are not acceptable.

Khaleda

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arrest of BNP leaders Anwar Zahid, DCC commissioners Makbul Ahmed and Chowdhury Alam, Jagpa President Shaful Alam Prodhan and other leaders and workers of BNP and its front organisations.

She expressed deep sympathy for those who were injured or fell victims to police attacks and repression during the hartal and demanded immediate release of all arrested leaders and workers.

The BNP Chairperson said the government, under which people's life and property, and country's independence and sovereignty are not safe, and which has become isolated from the people, has resorted to repressive measures to stay in power.

"Insha Allah, patriotic people of the country will give a befitting reply to the government and free the nation from this misrule," she said.

UNB adds, Jamaat-e-Islami Senior Nayebe-e-Amir Maulana Abbas Ali Khan also congratulated the countrymen for observing the opposition-sponsored dawn-to-dusk hartal yesterday.

In a statement, he deplored the attacks by ruling party's armed cadres and policemen on peaceful processions by opposition supporters during the hartal.

Khan condemned the attack on Jamaat office at Narayanganj. He demanded immediate reduction of the raised fuel price and release of the arrested leaders and workers.

Pak denial

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tense border Saturday. The defence ministry spokesman accused Indians of trying to sabotage next month's talks aimed at improving relations between the two countries.

"It all seemed to be a known pattern of sabotaging the dialogue whenever it was initiated to ease tension between Pakistan and India," the spokesman said.

"They (Indians) have also increased the helicopter activity along the line of control in recent days to vitiate the atmosphere for the forthcoming dialogue" between the two countries, the spokesman said.

India and Pakistan, in a new bid to improve long strained relations, marked by two wars over Kashmir, resumed bilateral talks in March after a break of more than three years.

BNP to hold

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announced that his party will stage demonstrations throughout the country tomorrow protesting the "police action". He also demanded release of the arrested partymen and withdrawal of the enhanced fuel prices.

"The next course of action will be announced from tomorrow's programme", he said.

BNP vice-chairman MK Anwar, MP, former home minister Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Jatiyatabadi Ulema Dal leader Nabibul Bashir Maizbhandari, central leaders Amanullah Aman, MP, Habibur Rahman Habib, Salahuddin Ahmed and MAB Jallil and Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal president Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anny were among the injured, Mannan Bhuiyan said.

The arrested persons, including a DCC commissioner, Chowdhury Alam, Mannan Bhuiyan said. "Police started charging batons, firing tear gas shells and chasing the peaceful pro-hartal activists from 9:30 am at different part of the city," he said.

Replying to a question, the BNP leader said his party was consulting other opposition parties regarding its future course of action. Some opposition parties will also follow BNP's demonstration programme, he added.

Asked to comment on the BCGMEA demand for keeping the garments sector out of the pre-view of hartal, Mannan Bhuiyan said, "We'll think of it in future... But before that tell them (garments businessmen) to ask the government to withdraw its 52 days of hartal a year (indicating inclusion of Saturday in the weekly holidays)."

Nari Samaj

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torch procession after the meeting. They also pelted stones and bricks.

After some efforts, Farida Akhtar managed to restore order at the rally.

The Nari Samaj in a press release later strongly deplored the attack.

At the rally, the speakers demanded exemplary punishment to those who were responsible for the incidents involving Yasmin, Seema and Nurjahan, and called for building up of strong social movement against repression on women.

They expressed apprehension that the way the incidents of rape and oppression against women were increasing, was alarming to the security of women.

The rally was addressed by, among others, Sultana Akhtar Ruby, Farida Akhtar, Sigma Huda, Samillito Nari Samaj leaders Maleka Begum, Naila Khan, Shaheen Anam and Shirin Akhtar attended the rally.

After the rally, the Sammilito Nari Samaj brought out a protest procession that paraded the street from the Press Club to Shahbagh Crossing.

JS: bills

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District and the Upazila Councils to ensure decentralisation and accountability of the administration at the grassroots level.

The offices under the Health, Education, Agriculture, Disaster Management, Relief, Livestock, Fisheries, Social Welfare, Women and Children Affairs, Youth and Cultural ministries will be placed under these two elected councils.

About three lakh government officials and employees will be deputed under the District and Upazila Councils with the implementation of the new provisions.

Replying to a question, Zillur Rahman said a five-member Secretariat Commission headed by Cabinet Secretary Ataul Huq is preparing a report on power and function, right to revenue assessment, taxation and collection by the District and the Upazila Councils.

The report will be submitted to the government this month.