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The World on Time



Participants in the roundtable on 'Parliamentary Committee Report on the death of Seema Chowdhury,' organised by The Daily Star, at the WVA auditorium in the city yesterday.

— Star photo

## Roundtable on Sheema's death

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Barrister Amirul Islam severely criticised the Parliamentary Committee terming it "insincere". He noted that the committee should have examined the total system of governance to find out where things went wrong in Sheema's case. But it was not done.

"Before writing this report, the committee should have realised that this murder is a conscience issue, and not a party issue," he said.

"We are living in a society where justice is not available to the poor, especially women. Sheema murder case reflects the condition of the society," Barrister Islam observed.

"Firstly, a question should be answered. She had not committed any crime, neither did she lodge any complaints. Why did the police question her? Is it a crime for a 16-year-old girl to go out with a man? Why did the police interfere? And why did the police ask her to stay in their camp? Instead of sending her to the Magistrate's court, why was she sent to thana? These chronology of events clearly leads us to think that they had bad intentions," he said.

He added that the arrest and custody of Sheema had violated the Constitution and law of the country. "Nobody in the police, court or the parliament raised the point that fundamental rights and the Constitution was violated in Sheema's case. Without a lawful ground, nobody can take anyone into custody," Amirul Islam said.

"It appears that none in the court, parliament or police was sincere about digging into the Sheema murder case," he added.

Barrister Islam also questioned the integrity of hospital authorities in the country saying that following the rape of Sheema, the Officer-in-Charge of Raozan thana had taken her to Chittagong Medical College Hospital but four departments had refused to admit her.

"It is regrettable that when a girl is raped, she is also virtually raped by the hospital, police, court and finally by the media. Sheema was mistreated at all levels," he said.

"This type of incidents is

going on for a long time. We had told the courts that there is nothing called safe custody. The courts would not listen. The courts would not try to understand the difference between the legal right of custody and the right of the individual for freedom," Amirul Islam added.

Attorney General KS Nabi observed that Sheema's case was not the worst case in the country and he was trying hard to fight for the case.

"The onus of the death of Sheema under police custody goes to the police," he said.

The Parliamentary Committee conducted a separate investigation and all witnesses had been questioned.

He urged the women rights organisations to concentrate more on the overall situation of women's rights instead of focusing on single cases.

Rashed Khan Menon said that the parliamentary committee report did not reflect the public trust vested in the MPs. "It is full of innumerable flaws. This report should be challenged in the House," he said.

"It is clear that the committee did not function neutrally. Rather, it functioned under some political belief," Menon said. "It seems that Yasmin's death was seen as BNP's failure and Sheema's death as Awami League's failure".

Women's rights activist Maleka Begum questioned why victims were taken to "safe custody" and said that this system should immediately go.

She said that the women's organisations had tried to take out Sheema from jail custody to their own custody, but they were not allowed.

Barrister Rabeya Bhuiyan, MP, said that she would try to raise the issue of the parliamentary committee report in the House.

About cases of rape, Rabeya Bhuiyan noted that there were laws in the country but not enough enforcement. "Even police don't know how to investigate properly the rape cases." She suggested reforms in the recruitment process so that a policeman comes from a family background that teaches one to show respect to women.

## Strike at BUET continues

Academic activities of the University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) remained suspended due to strike for the second day yesterday, reports UNB.

The BCL and some other student bodies, enforced strike protesting attack on the university correspondent of a national daily.

Yesterday the activists of BCL and JCD chased each other on the campus.

Campus sources said the trouble started at about 10 am when a group of JCD activists were trying to hold a rally. But no untoward incident could take place as police intervened to the scene.

Hilton Das, a resident of Tumir Hall and Sangbad BUET correspondent, was assaulted allegedly by some JCD activists late Wednesday night as a sequel to a report containing extortion and tender-related corruption allegations against BUET VP and GS.

## Garments workers clash: 20 injured

GAZIPUR, Sept 21: Twenty garments workers were injured, one of them seriously, in a clash between two rival groups of workers at a garments factory here today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the clash began when supporters of the owner of Metro Garments attacked another group of workers who were staging demonstration at Tin Sarak in Sadar thana demanding two months'

## Suspected Naga insurgent to be brought to Dhaka today

CHITTAGONG, Sept 21: The suspected Naga insurgent, who was arrested on Wednesday from the port city, will be sent to the capital tomorrow for further interrogation, reports UNB.

The Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court of Chittagong today allowed seven days remand for Nagatu, an alleged member of Socialist Party of Indian state of Nagaland, following a petition by police.

Police and other security agencies had interrogated Nagatu on Wednesday and Thursday morning before producing him in the CMM Court.

22 militants shot dead in Kashmir

SRINAGAR, Sept 21: Indian troops today shot dead 22 Muslim separatist guerrillas in Kashmir, the military said, reports AFP.

Sixteen of the militants were killed in a fierce firefight at Berwa woods in central Kashmir, an army spokesman said.

The Press Trust of India (PTI) said the dead men belonged to the pro-Pakistan Lashkar-e-Taiba group. One of them was reported to be a foreigner.

The fighting was sparked off by a cordon and search operation launched by the army to detect foreign militants.

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Ershad

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structural movement to protect people's interests.

Ershad said BNP is now damaging cars, uprooting rail tracks and destroying property. "People of this poor country are the owners of every single property and none will be able to go to power through such anarchic acts."

The JP Chairman questioned if BNP's "subversive acts" are helping peasants and workers, and said the government, which is unable to protect the poor people's interests, has no right to remain in power.

The former president called upon the people to take decision about the next general election. "Evaluate all activities of the governments and decide who you will vote for in the next election," he said.

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The minister asked the offi-

cial of the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) to expedite their efforts to expand and diversify the country's export items and the markets abroad.

Export fetched a total 458 million US dollars in July, the first month of the current 1997-98 fiscal, while the income was 385.72 million dollars in the same month of 1996-97 fiscal.

The export figures were disclosed at a review meeting on export, held in the city yesterday with Commerce and Industries Minister Tofael Ahmed in the chair.

The meeting reviewed the latest export position. It was told that the growth rate is being maintained also in August.

The export target for the 1997-98 fiscal has been fixed at 5 billion US dollars against the previous year's income of 4.42 billion dollars.

Exports in the month of July was 9.9 per cent higher than the target, the meeting was told.

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