

BLUE DART

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Tough response to report

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diplomatic niceties by holding a press conference without prior permission of the host government, or at least informing them about it as a matter of courtesy. Many of them interpreted the US mission's gesture of ignoring its diplomatic obligation as the United States' "usual arrogance in a unipolar world," while others observed that it was the lack of integrity of the country's major political parties that had time and again created scopes for the foreign missions, especially that of the US to interfere with our various internal affairs — political and economic.

All of them found Holzman's argument that he could not seek the permission due to Eid holidays to be a lame excuse as the government offices were open on the day the report was released.

However, the nationalistic ego of many was satisfied as the Foreign Ministry showed the guts to summon the US Ambassador, John C Holzman, just the day after, to communicate its dissatisfaction over the incident.

But what surprised many was that the government rejected outright the contents of the human rights report by saying that "the US report contains inaccuracies, half-truths and unsubstantiated allegations." Terming the report a mere "compilation of heresies and misinformation that badly lacked objectivity," the Foreign Secretary complained that the report was "gathered from local press as if the press reports were gospel truths."

What was the content of the US report on Bangladesh? It talked about the country's poverty level, various impediment

ments in economic, including corruption, restrictions on or denial of many fundamental rights of the citizens, violence against women, discrimination against the disabled and religious minorities, extra-judicial killings committed by police, deaths in police custody under suspicious circumstances, impunity enjoyed by police who routinely use torture and other forms of abuse in interrogating suspects, indiscriminate use of so-called national security laws including the notorious Special Powers Act against political opponents and so on.

Now, can an any sensible person deny the fact that the people of Bangladesh have been exposed to the said human rights violations since long and the phenomena would continue even years after a political party, ideally committed to the people, takes over?

But our Foreign Secretary can. He has even gone to the extent of politically defending the government of Sheikh Hasina by claiming that she had never made any commitment to abolish the SPA. Had he scanned the local newspapers which he visibly loves to undermine, the Foreign Secretary could see that Sheikh Hasina had several times criticised the government of Khaleda Zia for its failure to repeal the SPA. Scanning of the local newspapers would have also helped the Foreign Secretary to know that a top-ranking Awami League leader had moved a resolution in the Fifth Parliament seeking repeal of the SPA and the party legislators headed by Sheikh Hasina voted for the resolution. The resolution was not passed as the then ruling BNP voted against. It is a common knowledge that the front ranking AL

leaders had in the past repeatedly demanded, in and outside the parliament, abolition of the Act.

The State Minister for Foreign Affairs came up with the most disappointing statement on the much talked about issue of deaths in police custody. In an interview with the BBC on February 5 last, the state minister not only refused to accept that the government has to take, 'at least partially,' the responsibility of deaths in police custody, but also argued that the police should not be blamed for such deaths. In this regard, the western educated state minister told the BBC: "Lives and deaths of the people depend on the wish of God." The statement has just taken many back to the recent past when the same man had rightly criticised both the government of Khaleda Zia and the police for the death of Yasmin in police custody.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) has defended the US report by arguing that it reflected only part of the human rights abuses. While defending the US report, party Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in a statement said that the report only reflected a portion of human rights abuses in the country. He also termed, perhaps rightly, the Foreign Secretary's bid to compare OJ Simpson's case with that of Seema Chowdhury to be funny.

But the 'nationalist' party failed to appreciate the government's bid to assert the country's authority against the US mission's failure to seek permission ahead of holding the press conference. Many people considered this act, rather the inaction, to be a typical limitation of the political parties of the country to appreciate political opponents even for a good job.

JCD

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tivities."

The JCD activists wore black badges and carried black flags during the demonstration that began from in front of the Modhu canteen at about 11 am.

Police intercepted the protestor at the gate in front of Rokeya Hall after the JCD activists broke the gate. They staged a rally there.

At around 11:30am, JCD activists tried to move towards the TSC area and at one stage they hurled brick bats at police. Police chased the activists and charged baton to disperse them. Vice-president of JCD central committee Sabahuddin Laltu sustained minor injury.

JCD activists gathered again in front of the DUCSU building after half an hour and held a rally there.

Meanwhile, at least seven gunshots were heard at around 2 pm from behind the International Hostel of the university, located near Jasimuddin Hall.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL), the student wing of ruling Awami League, brought out a procession at about 11 am welcoming the Prime Minister on the campus.

Some 185 book stalls have been set up this year.

Observe hartal in Ctg Div Feb 10: BNP

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday called upon the people to observe dawn-to-dusk hartal in Chittagong division and stage demonstration in the rest of the country on February 10 for cancellation of the CHT accord, reported UNB.

In a statement, Bhuiyan warned that the government's attempt to implement the accord disregarding public opinion would lead to dangerous consequences. The people have rejected this 'black agreement,' he added.

He said BNP is always sincere to establish peace in the CHT within the framework of the Constitution and safeguarding equal rights of both tribals and non-tribals living in that region.

Bhuiyan alleged that the government had blocked the establishment of peace in the hill tracts by signing the agreement.

Book Fair opens

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Bangla' imbued with the spirit of the Ekushey, she added.

But a vested quarter always had tried to destroy the spirit and values of the language movement. The most heinous strike was made by them on August 15, 1975, when Bangabandhu was assassinated, she said.

They had tried to destroy the spirit of the language movement, but could not succeed for the resistance from the conscious section of the society, literateurs, intellectuals and cultural activists, the Prime Minister added.

Conscious people were always active in all the progressive movement of the country, she said, calling upon them to remain alert and build up strong resistance against the reactionary groups.

The Prime Minister, who also laid the foundation of the multi-story Ekushey Bhaban on the Bangla Academy premises, hoped that this building will be nerve centre for the activities of Bangalee culture.

This building will be used as a research centre of Bangalee culture for its proper grooming and flourishing, she said.

Stressing the need for using Bangla language in every sphere of life, the Prime Minister suggested publishing of the academic books in Bangla.

Presided over by Chairman of Bangla Academy poet Shamsur Rahman, the function was also addressed by educationist Dr Nileema Ibrahim, State Minister for Cultural Affairs Obaidul Quader, Bangla Academy Director General Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, Book Publisher and Sellers' Association president Syed Fazlul Huq and Mela committee member secretary Habibul Alam.

Later, the Prime Minister formally opened the three-week-long book fair. She also visited different stalls of the book fair.

Some 185 book stalls have been set up this year.

Pak FM

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tripartite meeting held recently in Dhaka between the leaders of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, Indian officials were reluctant even to amend the original draft declaration although the three leaders had agreed on certain changes.

An officer refused even to add the words 'peace and security' into the draft which was agreed upon by the three prime ministers," he claimed.

Leaders of Pakistan and Bangladesh had to intervene and urge Gujral to personally give instructions to the official to incorporate the agreed words," he added. Admitting that the Gujral doctrine is a unique policy concept which could ensure good neighbourly relations, Khan said, "Gujral is like the person who promised a son to everybody. It is not realistic."

Although Khan made the maximum use of his Colombo visit to woo colleagues from 15 countries, including SAARC foreign ministers, he did not get much support for his scathing attacks on India, mainly on his country's long-standing dispute with India over Kashmir.

Inflation

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kept inflation at a lofty level. Since food accounts for over 50 per cent of the newly introduced inflation basket, the experts said that unless the government could effectively control the spiralling trend of rice prices, the inflation trend is unlikely to come down.

The inflation rate in the urban areas were higher than in the rural areas in the first six months of the current fiscal from July to December. For urban areas it was 8.13 per cent in July, 8.49 per cent in August, 8.66 per cent in September, 7.38 per cent in October, 5.54 per cent in November and 5.9 per cent in December.

For rural areas, it was 5.26 per cent in July, 6.07 per cent in August, 6.47 per cent in September, 7.83 per cent in October, 5.63 per cent in November and 5.98 per cent in December.



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PHILIPS

No progress in payment

From page 1

Petrobangla, which signed the Production Sharing Contract with the Occidental, however, is now planning to claim compensation from the US company for destroying the gas reservoir located in those two blocks, Petrobangla chairman told The Daily Star yesterday.

The five-day conference on "Arsenic pollution of ground water in Bangladesh: Causes, effects and remedies" begins with field trip of the participants to the arsenic-affected Chandpur village under Luximpur district.

Organised jointly by Dhaka Community Hospital Trust (DCHT) and School of Environmental Studies, Jadavpur University of Calcutta, the conference will be formally inaugurated on February 9 at the LGED auditorium at Agargaon.

Former chief advisor of the caretaker government Justice Mohammad Habibur Rahman will open the conference.

Addressing a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, DCHT Chairman Prof Kazi Quamruzzaman said 127 participants from Bangladesh and 108 from abroad will take part in the conference.

The participating countries include Australia, Canada, China, Chile, France, India, Japan, Sweden, Taiwan, Thailand, United Kingdom, Denmark, France and the United States.

The conference is likely to demand a compensation for at least 200 billion cubic feet of gas worth 500 million US dollars, sources said adding that the figure may further increase.

The organisation is likely to demand a compensation for at least 200 billion cubic feet of gas worth 500 million US dollars, sources said adding that the figure may further increase.

The Petrobangla will place its demand for compensation from the Occidental shortly," the chairman said adding, it was yet to calculate the losses suffered due to the blow-out.

The organisation is likely to demand a compensation for at least 200 billion cubic feet of gas worth 500 million US dollars, sources said adding that the figure may further increase.

If the compensation for the burn out gas of the reservoir is settled in terms of local gas price rather than the international price by the Petrobangla, then the country will incur huge losses, experts observed.

Following the blow-out, production 19 tea gardens in the surrounding area suffered as the gas supply was disrupted for quite some time.

A six-member committee of the Bangladesh Tea Board estimated the losses of the team estates at Tk 45 crore 74 lakh in terms of loss of production and other damages. Of all, the team estates, Fulbari Tea Estate alone suffered a loss of Tk 31 crore 8 lakh, the estimate revealed.

Fulbari, where the original exploration well and the relief well is located, suffered severe damages as 80 acres of its land were lost due to the explosion.

Fulbari prepared the claims for the damaged 80 acres as per the formula applied for settling the compensation for the original drilling site and subsequently for the relief well, sources said.

"Now, they are trying to dictate their own terms, paying no heed to the two agreements signed and acted upon earlier," said a source. Fulbari now has

served a legal notice on Occidental for realising its compensation claim.

Initially, the Occidental offered to pay Tk 1.97 crore which the tea garden owners refused.

The claim settlement issue,

however, remained pending as

the Occidental assured of taking proper measures later.

Plants, trees and soil of the

forest adjacent to the area were

also severely damaged and the

environment was also affected

due to emission of various gases

and smoke.

The Department of Forest

has claimed a compensation Tk

176 crore 17 lakh 48 thousand

and 400, for the huge damaged

area.

Afghanistan

seeks aid from

Bangladesh

Afghanistan has appealed to

Bangladesh to extend humani-

tar assistance in the after-

math of the devastating earth-

quake which rocked the land-

locked country Wednesday

claiming over 4000 lives, re-

ports BSS.

President of the Islamic

state of Afghanistan Prof

Burhanuddin Rabbani made

the appeal to President

Shahabuddin Ahmed, Afghan

Charge d'Affaires Ghulam

Mohammed Sukhanyar said yes-

terday.

In his message, Prof Rabbani

requested President Ahmed

to give instruction to send hu-

manitarian assistance to earth

quake victims in the Takhar

province at the earliest possi-

bility.

Farrakhan

From page 1

He ridiculed the outward generosity of the US govern-

ment. "It has been constructing