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Govt closing down mills, factories: Khaleda

KALIAKOIR (Gazipur), May 2: Opposition leader Begum Khaleda Zia who will lead a mass procession in the capital tomorrow (Monday) urged the people to express their no-confidence in the government by joining the street agitation, reports UNB.

"Join the mass procession and demonstrate that you are no longer with this corrupt government," she told a May Day workers' rally at Chandra Maidan on Saturday.

Khaleda renewed her plea for meeting the five-point demand that included resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner.

"We are in movement and we'll be compelled to go for one-point out-government movement soon if our demands are not met."

Organised by local Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal, the rally was also addressed by Tanvir Ahmed Siddiqui, Abdullah Al Noman, A S M Hannan Shah, Selima Rahman, Prof M A Mannan, Nazrul Islam Khan, Amanullah Aman, Khandaker Abdus Salam and Hasan Sarker with Maksudur Rahman Helali in the chair.

Maj Gen (ret'd) Z A Khan, Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahabubul Alam and former DIG Ziauddin Ahmed Murad were present at the meeting.

The BNP chairperson blamed the government for closing down mills and factories rendering thousands of workers paupers as part of its 'India-appeasement policy'.

"New industries are growing up in India cashing in on the shutdown of our mills and factories," the former prime minister said.

She said Awami League government could not mention any development work done by it in the country. "It has presented candle and lantern in the evening instead of electric light."

The BNP chief claimed that some 3 lakh people were employed during her regime in 13,000 garment industries raising the number from 700 units.

Criticising the government for reneging its election pledges to workers and farmers, the Leader of the Opposition urged all sections of people — workers and farmers — to join the ongoing movement for protecting their rights.

"Farmers, workers, teachers, students and people in general will not survive if the government stays in power anymore."

The former prime minister pledged that farmers would get fair price of their farm products and new mills and factories would be set up if BNP returned to power.

"Implement Wages Commission Award: SNS" By Staff Correspondent

The Sammilita Nari Samaj (SNS) yesterday demanded implementation of Wages Commission Award for factory workers and protested widespread sexual repression on female workers.

A press release last night said the SNS leaders at a rally at the TSC road island also protested axing of workers and demanded an end to disparity in wages for male and female workers. The rally was organised on the occasion of the May Day.

They alleged that workers had to work at many garment factories in Mirpur, Farmgate, Mahakhali, Banani and Gulshan in the city on the May Day though it was a government holiday.

The SNS leaders asked for a clarification from the BGMSEA as to why many garment factories were open and the workers were not allowed to enjoy the holiday.

They said although a new home minister has taken over, women are still facing violence and sexual repression at work place, the press release said. They demanded exemplary punishment for repression on women.

Earlier, SNS brought out a procession from Shahbagh.

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In the other incident, two youths, identified as Kamal and Nurul, got inside the shanty of the 12-year-old girl and dragged her into a nearby abandoned house at about 11 am Sunday, according to hospital sources.

There they violated her and then left her unconscious beside a road at around 3:30 in the morning. Local people admitted her to Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition, the sources added.

A case was lodged with Ruggani thana, but no one could be arrested till filing of the report late last night.

PM: Pay hike From Page 1

Commission. The Prime Minister announced that the pay enhanced would be made effective from July 1, 1997.

Sheikh Hasina also brought a public accusation against the opposition of trying to unseat her government by patronising killings and conspiracy.

"They want to hatch up artificial crisis through killing and conspiracy... They want to create chaos in the name of movement and oust the government," she told the rally.

Hasina urged the people to stand to all machinations and secure democracy and a stable economy for the welfare of the working people.

Workers belonging to different trade unions, some wearing red uniform and holding miniature red flags, attended the rally shouting various slogans for the government.

Petrobangla From Page 1

Earlier in December, the Cabinet Committee gave green signal to Unocal's 750 million US dollar WRIP, despite Petrobangla's opinion that the project might have a 'negative impact' on the country's economy.



Rickshaws rule the road Thousands of licensed and unlicensed rickshaws choke the city streets, virtually blocking traffic, evident in the picture taken from Gulistan area yesterday. See editorial on page 4.

BRAC office in Sylhet looted

From Staff Correspondent SYLHET, May 2: Cash and valuables worth about Tk 2.48 lakh were looted from the BRAC office at Telirbazar of Sylhet sadar thana early hours today.

Police said, about 10 to 12 miscreants swooped on the staff at about 3:30 am today and took away Tk 1.5 lakh in cash and goods worth about one lakh taka from there at gun point.

Manager of the branch lodged a case with Kotwali police. None was arrested.

100 shops gutted in Chittagong From Our Correspondent

CHITTAGONG, Apr 2: At least 100 shops were gutted in a devastating fire at Reazuddin Bazar in the city in the early hours of yesterday.

The fire originated from a short circuit and soon engulfed the entire market.

The shop owners estimated the loss at about Tk one crore. A panicky situation was created in the area as terrified employees of the shops ran helter-skelter. Huge goods were looted during the blaze.

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The Committee asked the Energy Ministry to finalise a Production Sharing Contract (PSC) for Shahbazpur Gasfield, a Gas Purchase Sales Agreement (GPSA), Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), a pipeline contract and a pipeline tariff contract within three months.

The process was slowed down following the observations by the US Department of Energy.

But, under instruction from higher authorities, Petrobangla recently sent its officials to Khulna to determine the route of the proposed pipeline, the sources said.

Ironically, the government asked BAPEX, the exploration unit of Petrobangla, to provide necessary expertise for the WRIP.

BAPEX had discovered the Shahbazpur Gasfield in 1995 and submitted a proposal for its development. But the government brushed aside BAPEX's proposal and inducted Unocal in late 1996.

The Shahbazpur Gasfield is estimated to have more than 400 billion cubic feet (bcf) of recoverable gas, the sources said.

Unocal says that its project will allow replacement of imported liquid fuel with domestic natural gas and thus Bangladesh would save approximately 70 million US dollars per year in foreign exchange.

Battle to eradicate last 10pc of polio starts: WHO

By Staff Correspondent

The virus is spread through contaminated faeces or oral secretion or by eating food or drink that have been contaminated. The virus enters the body through mouth and after dormancy period between 4 and 35 years, it enters the bloodstream and attacks the nervous system.

Dr W Hardjotanojo, WHO country representative for Bangladesh, said, "At this stage, it is vital that every single child is reached with polio vaccine so that all children are covered. If we have to achieve the year 2000 goal of global polio eradication, then we must reach the last 10 per cent now left out."

To meet the challenge, WHO has taken up a plan to accelerate the implementation of house-to-house campaigns in the remaining polio endemic (transmittable zone) countries including Bangladesh and Nepal.

The strategies are improving routine polio vaccination coverage and helping conduct national immunisation days, implement high quality surveillance of paralysed children and gear up house-to-house mopping up campaign.

"This will have an enormous impact on reducing transmission of wild poliovirus in one of the last reservoirs in the region," explained Dr Jon Andrus, a polio expert from WHO's regional office.

Bangladesh has a remarkable achievement of about 98 per cent polio vaccination coverage through its extended programme of immunisation (EPI).

UNB adds: State Minister for Health M Amanullah said, six confirm polio cases out of 39 suspects were diagnosed after completion of the first round of the fifth National Immunization Day in 1998.

Disclosing the figures he said all should work hard to eradicate poliomyelitis (polio) from Bangladesh as NID coverage appeared to be decreasing last year and polioviruses still being detected in four divisions.

"Polio eradication programme in Bangladesh has been one of the most successful health programmes and the day is not too far when we would be able to announce complete elimination of polio cases in the country," said Dr Shamsul Haq, director, Primary Healthcare.

Among others who spoke on the occasion are, health minister Anwarul Haque, UNICEF country representative, Ms Azfar and director general of health services Prof A K M Nurul Anwar.

Representatives from Rotary International, UNICEF, USAID, Japanese government, JICA, DFID, DANIDA and CDC were present at the press conference as partners of the WHO that have large contributions to the polio eradication mission. All the partners provide technical and financial assistance to WHO for the mission.

Bid to force wife into prostitution: Husband held

By Staff Correspondent

A man was arrested on Saturday allegedly for torturing his wife at his Lalmitia residence in the city after she refused to get herself into sex trade, police and hospital sources said.

Critically injured Samanja Trishna, 21, the victim, was undergoing treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, the sources said.

Halim Mahmud, the husband, was arrested when father of the victim lodged a case with Mohammadpur Thana Friday.

According to police, Firoz Ahmed, father of the housewife, rescued a severely injured Trishna from the Lalmitia residence on the night of April 26 for making bombs and they also took part in the attack on teachers' quarters, one student leader claimed.

When contacted, DC (South) of DMP Hasan Mahmud Khondaker claimed that police were quick to act and rushed to the spot promptly.

Three big projects to strengthen road communications network

The government is going to implement three gigantic projects costing over Tk 3268 crore to build a strong road communications network linking all parts of the country, reports UNB.

A high-level meeting at the PM's office yesterday with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair made a preview of the physical works of the schemes to be started shortly.

The three projects, being implemented by the Roads and Highways Department, are Tk 2247.62 crore Third Road Rehabilitation and Maintenance Project (RRMP), Tk 453 crore Bhairab Bridge project and Tk 567 crore Paksey Bridge project.

Communications Secretary Syed Rezaul Hayat Khan apprised the meeting that under the Third RRMP eight components for rehabilitation and construction of roads and bridges would be implemented.

The components are over Tk 888.85 crore 34.5 km Dhaka-Sylhet highway rehabilitation works, construction of Nalka-Hatkamul-Banpara road involving over Tk 396.48 crore construction of over Tk 470.39 crore feeder road and Tk 266.38 crore international and regional highway-maintenance scheme.

Mass Processions

From Page 1

planned to go for a half-day hartal on May 3 but later shifted it as they shifted the mass procession programme from April 29 to May 3.

However, a half-day hartal is scheduled for tomorrow in districts under Khulna Division to protest filing of "conspiratorial" case against BNP leader Tariqul Islam and frequent incidents of murder and terrorism in the southern region.

Liaison committee meeting sources said the BNP favoured a half-day hartal on May 11 only in the capital city, but the Jatiya Party disagreed. The JP argued in favour of a half-day hartal throughout the country on Sunday or Thursday 'as per tradition'.

After failing to reach a consensus on the date, the liaison committee meeting decided that the issue be discussed with policymakers in the respective parties. As per the decision, the issue was discussed at the level of policy makers last night.

"We could not finalise the date of our planned hartal today. We will sit again tomorrow morning to finalise the date. Top leaders of the opposition parties will announce the hartal programme tomorrow (Monday)," IOJ leader ARM Abdul Matin told The Daily Star.

The sources said there will be a series of demonstration programmes this month.

BNP leaders M Shamsul Islam and Anwar Zahid, JP President member Kazi Feroz Rashid, Jamaat leaders Mohammad Kamaruzzaman, Abdul Kader Mollah and ATM Azharul Islam, IOJ leaders Mufti Fazul Haq Amin and ARM Abdul Matin attended the meeting.

The opposition will bring some ammunition from the spot. No casualty was reported. Fatikchhari as the situation was prevailing there.

Police sources said that the incident was a sequel to intra-party rivalry of BCL, Fatikchhari unit.

Meherpur-1 From Page 1

day afternoon for deferment of the by-elections. But after a "formal hearing", the EC rejected the appeal.

Meherpur-1 seat of parliament fell vacant following BNP legislator Ahmed Ali's death on February 13. According to the Constitution, by-election in the seat has to be held by May 14.

But the EC does not see any 'practical scope' for deferment of the by-election.

Chief Election Commissioner Mohammad Abu Hena told The Daily Star last night the appeal by JP (Monju) was rejected on several grounds.

"The Appellate Division has not barred holding of the by-election on the stipulated date. Secondly, we have already made all necessary preparations, including deployment of the members of Army, Bangladesh Rifles and police, to hold the polls," the CEC said. "Besides, there is no practical scope to defer the elections when the Higher Secondary Certificate examinations that begin across the country on May 6 will continue till June."

Meanwhile, EC sources said that Mustasim Billah was not the 'original candidate' of JP (Monju). "Billah had filed nomination as an independent candidate. The party picked him up when nomination of its original candidate was cancelled on ground of bank loan default," said a top level EC official.

Vajpayee From Page 1

interview published in its latest edition that he disavowed making the "foreign origin" of Sonia Gandhi, an issue in the coming elections saying this would not be "healthy".

Outlining the nature of anti-Sonia campaign the BJP would launch in the coming election-campaign, Sharma said the controversial deal for purchase of Swedish guns, which was finalised during the reign of Rajiv Gandhi, and the alleged kickbacks in the deal would naturally come up once Sonia Gandhi decides to jump into electoral fray.

He said the BJP would focus on the "ties" between the Gandhi family and Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, an accused in the Bofors case.

Sharma said it was going to be Vajpayee versus Sonia Gandhi for the country's prime ministerial post and the Congress president, "is the issue in this election."

Suggestions have already been by some allies of the BJP that amendments to the Indian constitution be considered to bar a person of 'foreign origin' from occupying the post of president, vice president and prime minister of India.

Reuters adds: Dates for the new election in which more than 600 million people are eligible to vote are likely to be set this week.

Vajpayee remained the voters' top choice to lead the country, a new opinion poll said today. A Times of India poll showed that 48 per cent of people in major Indian cities felt Vajpayee was the most suitable candidate for the prime minister's job.

Only 24 per cent gave their support to Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born head of Congress.

Tornado From Page 1

ices were also damaged by the tornado. The seriously wounded victims are Momin, 16, Badshah, 60, Nurullah, 46, Motiur, 68, Momena, 67, Badul, 17, Bulbul, 4, and Uzal, 3. They were admitted to nearby health centres and hospitals.

The tornado-hit villages are Shingmari, Andarabala, Brahmanur, Charbalabari, Dhulabari, Kachakata, Kamartari, Balabari, Keranipara, Kaligani Bazar, Mompinara, Jobanaradukuthi, Nawapara, Jakaripara, Tariapara, Mollapara and a cluster village called Pashchim Poiradanga.

While reviewing the projects, the Prime Minister directed the authorities concerned to take into serious consideration topographical and ecological conditions of the respective areas.

She also directed the Communications Ministry to take up a project for constructing a bridge over river Teesta.

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