

BCL activists create havoc at Polytechnic Instt

By Staff Correspondent

Ruling party-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) yesterday locked up the Dhaka Polytechnic Institute, Tejgaon and confined the authorities inside demanding admission of their selective candidates into the college.

College sources said that the BCL leaders submitted a list of some 100 students to the college authorities a couple of days back with a demand for their admission into the college. They also created pressure on the college authorities to admit their selected students with fake documents.

Following the college authorities' ignorance of the matter, the BCL leaders began to harass the students who were allowed in this year's admission test. They stopped many students at the college gate and snatched away their necessary papers needed to get admitted.

The BCL men also beat up a number of students who came to the college for admission purposes in the last few days, college sources said.

The situation worsened when a group of BCL leaders, led by Shaikat Hossain, Tariqul Alam and Shaqilul Islam intercepted Munna, son of the college's vice-principal came to the college at about 11 am yesterday.

The troublemaker stopped them at the main entrance to the college and beat them up. They also beat up the elder son of the vice-principal when he tried to stop the beating.

Later, the vice-principal, Mohammad Abdur Rahman who was at his office at the time, arrived at the scene to save his sons. The vice-principal threatened the BCL men with dire consequences.

The BCL activists then brought out a procession at the college and locked up all the rooms of the college, including the rooms of the principal and vice-principal. They confined the authorities inside the institute premises for about an hour and threatened to close down the college if their demand were not met.

Tejgaon police went to the college at about 12:30 and brought the situation under control.

The college authorities filed a general diary (GD) at Tejgaon thana in this connection. The college authorities later condemned the incident at a meeting.

Police were deployed at the college as tension was mounting there following the incident.



Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha formed a human chain in front of the Foreign Ministry yesterday demanding formal apology from Pakistan for genocide committed by Pakistani Occupation Forces during the War of Liberation in 1971. -- Star photo

PM: law and order

From page 1

Hasina said the culprits should be exposed and the people should remain alert against them. She also blamed the opposition parties for instructing their cadres to create a law and order situation.

Arms smuggling and troops alert

Asked about the reported attempt by a separatist group in the Indian state of Assam to smuggle arms through Bangladesh, the prime minister told journalists that her government was looking into the matter.

"As you know, we're having official talks with India on the issue. We've sent the foreign secretary (to New Delhi) to discuss the matter as well as ratification of the Indira-Mujib treaty. She said an inquiry would be launched into the reported seizure of huge arms at Cox's Bazar. She recalled that arms were also smuggled through the Cox's Bazar border earlier and the smugglers were detained, too.

"Besides, there are some terrorist and communal groups in our country who use arms. And, the opposition parties often issue arms threats. Therefore, it is not surprising to learn about fresh incidents of arms smuggling."

The PM categorically said that no separatist group would be allowed to carry out clandestine activities in Bangladesh.

According to press reports, India put its troops on alert on Tuesday following reports that a huge consignment of arms was being transhipped through Bangladesh to the separatist groups in its northeast.

Irfan Raja

Asked for her comment about Pakistan's errand envoy Irfan Raja, she said her government was awaiting his departure as the Pakistani authorities had announced his recall. The Foreign Ministry is looking into the reasons for the delay in his departure. "We'll definitely take necessary steps if the diplomat does not leave within a certain period."

"A person who made derogatory remarks about our independence cannot stay on the soil of Bangladesh. Why isn't he leaving?" she wondered.

About similar comments by journalist Gias Kamal Chowdhury and Dhaka University teacher Afiah Ahmed, she said they should rather go to Pakistan out of their love for that country. The government has already taken action against the journalist, she said without elaborating.

The EC crisis

To another question about the crisis in the Election Commission, the prime minister said she should not interfere in the affairs of the Commission, which is an independent constitutional body.

"We hope they (the members of the Commission) themselves will resolve the crisis. But we're ready to extend any cooperation if they need it."

need... there should not be any such crisis... it's unfortunate."

She added that there had been a long struggle to introduce the provision for free and fair election under a caretaker government. But conspiracy was on to disrupt the hard-earned democratic process, she said. Hasina said the two leading opposition parties are undemocratic.

Power handover

Asked if she would hand over power after the next Independence Day, Hasina smiled and said her government would certainly celebrate the day in a befitting manner. "But the tenure of our government is up to July," she said, adding that she would hand over power at a suitable time.

She ridiculed BNP for agreeing to demand release of jailed president Ershad. With a note of sarcasm, she said, "Khaleda Zia who sued Ershad for corruption should now lead the movement for Ershad's release."

The PM told another newsmen that moves were on to bring the killers of Bangabandhu back from where they have taken refuge.

Earlier, the prime minister described her nine-day visit to Italy, Germany and Switzerland as "very successful and beneficial to economic interests of the country."

"The visit has further strengthened the existing ties and created a wide scope for economic cooperation."

Ensure fair dispensation of justice: Hasina

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday appealed to the judges to help establish a sound, impartial and corruption-free judicial system for quick and fair dispensation of justice in the country, reports UNB.

"We want to ensure democracy, rule of law, fair justice and independent judiciary... we want quick disposal of cases, public peace and safety," she told the 50th annual conference of the BCS (Judiciary) Association at the Osmani Auditorium.

Hasina said: "We've complete trust in the judiciary. But see that corruption does not creep into the judiciary so that this last resort of the people does not come under any question."

About adverse impact of corruption retarding advancement of society and economic development, she declared that many cases of corruption were suspended at initial stage.

The Prime Minister said most litigants, who are poor, want quick and fair justice. But delayed judgement generates apathy among the people towards the judiciary.

Termining delayed justice as a curse for the society, she urged judges to perform their responsibilities with honesty and efficiency.

She said that justice is a fundamental right of people.

"Please do justice, only justice," Hasina said, quoting William Watson "Let justice be done, though the heavens fall."

Long absence of democracy breeds corruption everywhere, she said, mentioning that the country was placed under military dictatorship and run by curfew for the period between 1975-86.

Since assuming power, Hasina said her government has been running the Affairs of the State democratically to fulfill the aspiration of the people and bring about socio-economic development.

Referring to the functions of the three organs of the state executive, judiciary and legislative, she hoped that these organs will perform their respective duties as complimentary to each other to ensure rule of law.

The Prime Minister said that rule of law is an indispensable ingredient for creation of an investment friendly atmosphere and overall economic development of a nation. This can be ensured through a fair judicial system.

Hasina said that the Law Commission has been working to update the old laws and dispose of piled-up pending cases as early

as possible. A Judicial Administration Training Institute has been set up to impart training to judicial officers for quality judgement.

Moreover, she added, legal aid committees headed by district judges were set up to provide legal help to poor litigants and the proposal for village courts is under active consideration of the government to ensure justice for rural people.

Responding to the demands of the BCS (Judiciary) Association, the Prime Minister assured that necessary steps will be taken for the security of district judges and increasing outfit allowances of judicial officers.

She said that after the NAM summit, some flats being constructed for the event, will be used for accommodation of judges.

Hasina also assured that appointment to higher courts will be made on the basis of competence.

Law Minister Abdur Mattin Khasru, Law Secretary Abdul Hye, Dhaka District and Sessions Judge and President of the association Abdur Mattin and association Secretary General Zahur Huq Dulal spoke at the opening session of the conference.

Dhaka asks Delhi

From page 1

he would consider this, according to Azad.

Azad said he and Singh also discussed ways to promote South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and agreed on the need to make the grouping more active. Both sides acknowledged the usefulness of SAARC, he said.

Political analysts here say the SAARC has run into uncertainty under the shadow of tension between India and Pakistan and the last summit, which was to be held in Kathmandu, has been postponed indefinitely.

The two leaders discussed the broad parameters of major areas of interest in bilateral relations setting the stage for the two-day meeting of Bangladesh Foreign Secretary C Shaif Sami and his Indian counterpart Lalit Mansingh beginning tomorrow, officials sources here said.

The foreign secretary level talks beginning tomorrow will cover security, scenario and economic issues. Security issue

is key on Indian agenda and New Delhi is expected to ask Dhaka to take more tangible measures to come down on some top leaders of the Assam insurgent outfit ULFA who India alleges have taken shelter in Bangladesh. Bangladesh says it will never allow its territory to be used for anti-Indian activities.

India, the fifth largest consumer of oil, electricity and gas, also looks forward to energy supply from Bangladesh. But observers here skeptical about much headway in this regard in the short run given the political compulsions of ruling Awami League, especially in view of the fact that fresh general elections in Bangladesh are just six months away.

The foreign secretary-level meeting is also likely to discuss cooperation in infrastructure projects, including strengthening of road and rail links. Efforts are on to operationalise Dhaka-Agartala bus service in January and revive Petrapole-Benapole rail link.

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Huge arms being sent for rebels

From page 1

Border guards in the frontier state of Mizoram state have been ordered to step up patrols along the borders with Bangladesh and Myanmar.

The security forces have been alerted and we shall see to it that no such arms consignment crosses our borders, Mizoram Chief Minister Zoramthanga (Eds: one name) told AFP from the state capital Aizawl.

Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina told reporters today that the matter would be investigated and also discussed by the foreign secretaries of the two countries now meeting in New Delhi.

The weapons have been brought in the past by Muslim fundamentalists and terrorists, but I want to make it clear that my government will never allow the use of Bangladesh's soil by separatists or terrorists," she said in reply to the development on return from a nine-day tour of Europe.

"Bangladesh wants peace and believes in peace and thus will never allow such elements on its soil," and Dhaka was alert so that such incidents cannot take place, Sheikh Hasina said.

She added that most of Bangladesh's border problems with India have been solved during her more than four years in office.

India's far-eastern frontiers have become a flourishing market for South Asian gunrunners, with the region's separatist guerrilla groups purchasing huge arms consignments on a regular basis.

Most of the weapons first find their way to the Arakans, a mountainous area in Myanmar, from parts of Thailand and Cambodia.

"Many of the northeastern militant groups have opened up front companies in Thailand and other Southeast Asian capitals to serve as a smokescreen for their agents to seek arms deals," said a top army commander engaged in counter-insurgency operations in Assam.

Slum dwellers should not be evicted

From page 12

Dr Rita Afsar, Senior Research Fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), said presently there is no low-cost housing in the country. Slum dwellers are not responsible for rising drug and criminal activities.

Prof Golam Rahman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) said ready-made garment factories can be shifted to different places such as Khulna and Mongla where there will be no communication problem.

He said a study can be conducted to this end. Financial institutions can also extend loan to a low-cost high rise building for the low-income group people, such as slum dwellers or garment workers, he noted.

Speaking about short-term steps Dr Nazma Begum of the Department of Economics at Dhaka University pointed out that building low-cost houses and hostels for garment employees and providing transport for the workers can reduce to a large extent the dependence of garment workers on slums.

While releasing a garment factory, there should be low-cost accommodation arrangement

near the factory for the workers. If needed, the government should give incentive to the factory owner for building such accommodation, she added.

Before thrashing out short- and long-term solution for garment workers living in city slums, the percentage of garment workers in city slums should be sorted out, Dr Nazma observed.

CUP Chairperson Md Shahabuddin demanded specific solution to this problem. Programmes such as one like Ghore Phera would not help much in solving the problem, he added.

Khan Mohammad Belayet Hussain, Acting Chairman of Rajuk, said slum dwellers used to pay for the place they lived in, but hoodlums and political towns own the property.

Pressure groups are creating obstacles for Rajuk, he said, adding that Rajuk was taking measures to evict illegal occupants. They even file cases in the court to foil Rajuk's initiatives, he mentioned.

The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam urged all concerned to make the housing problem of the slum dwellers a social agenda.

"Otherwise, it will not help create pressure on the government decision makers," he said attitude of the BGMEA towards the garment workers is not acceptable.

He hoped the BGMEA and garment factory owners would take immediate measures to ensure safety at the factory premises. Garment villages should be set up at different places outside Dhaka city to solve the housing problem, he added.

Tanzina Haque Hossain, National Coordinator, Life

Programme, UNDP, said the BGMEA has a social responsibility to handle issues such as housing for the workers and child labour.

Fatema Begum, resident of a slum at Kakrail, said banks are extending loan to defaulters and corrupt people. On the other hand, poor people are often harassed in getting very small amounts of bank loan.

Some other garment employees who participated in the discussion pointed out that female garment employees working in night shifts are often harassed while returning to slums from workplace.

Khurshid Alam, President of Bangladesh Garments Sramik Federation, observed that rehabilitation of slum dwellers would not be effective unless there are job opportunities for them around the place where they are rehabilitated.

Earlier, Dibalok Singh, Executive Committee Member of CUP, in his keynote paper said urbanisation in the country is growing at the rate of five to six per cent every year. More than 50 per cent of the country's population will be living in urban areas by the year 2025, he pointed out.

He said there is no employment opportunity for such large group of urban poor who are self-employed and who have given birth to an informal economy that is gaining momentum.

The government is contemplating massive eviction of slum dwellers before the NAM summit. More than 90 per cent of workers of garment factories are migrants, Singh mentioned.

Narsingdi fire tragedy Victims' families receive monetary compensation

NARSINGDI, Dec 12: Family members of 24 victims of the Chowdhury knitwear fire tragedy here today received compensation money, reports UNB.

Science and Technology Minister M Noor Uddin Khan handed over the cheques amounting to Tk 1 lakh each among the guardians of the victims at the Deputy Commissioner's office.

The remaining 15 enlisted victims will get the cheques after producing valid documents of nominees, said a handout.

Besides, Tk 5,000 will be given to each of the injured garment workers.

Some 50 workers were killed in the worst fire incident in the country's garments factory on November 25.

Guardians of some of the victims have taken away some bodies without performing autopsy and those are not being recognised officially.

Israel

From page 12

tion, submitted Sunday, becomes effective Tuesday.

Late Monday, an intense gun battle raged between the West Bank town of Beit Jalla and Gilva, a Jewish neighborhood built on land captured from Jordan in the 1967 Mideast war, annexed to Jerusalem and claimed by the Palestinians for their state.

An Israeli woman was seriously wounded in the neck, and two residents of Beit Jalla were injured. Israeli bullets pierced the windows and struck a wall in St. Nicholas, a small Greek-Orthodox church in Beit Jalla. Headstones in an adjacent graveyard were also damaged.

Since Israeli-Palestinian fighting erupted Sept. 28, there have been repeated firefights between Palestinians gunmen in Beit Jalla and Israeli soldiers in Gilva.

Rampura murder

From page 12

Police recovered decomposed bodies of two young men from the third floor of a flat at East Rampura and identified them as Suman and John, members of the city's notorious crime ring "Seven Star" group. They were killed following a feud over sharing toll money with their rivals, linked with another under world crime ring of the city.

Bank Draft

From page 1

long list of job options, wanted intending applicants to send Bank Draft of US\$40 per head to PO Box 67, Malden, MA-02148, USA.

Such fees, required for job or immigration in any country, can be sent through authorised dealer banks only to the party designated by that very country, not to anyone giving assurance of job or immigration abroad, the circular clarified.

Judgement

From page 1

Supreme Court will be given farewell today. Justice AM Mahmudur Rahman is going on LPR today and Justice Kazi Ebadul Huq on December 31.

Justice Kazi Ebadul Huq is being given farewell before his retirement because the court will be on vacation then.

Withdraw circular for LC margins

From page 1

register their protest.

The chamber leaders said the BB circular has been issued apparently to restrict foreign currency transactions, which is rather surprising as only two days ago the finance minister reportedly stated that there was no problem with the foreign currency reserves.

They said the margin requirements would have far-reaching adverse repercussions on the economy. The business and industry will suffer serious working capital shortage and increased cost of funds. This will deal a severe blow to the process of economic revival.

The leaders said the manufacturing sector, which already suffers from various problems, including low capital utilisation, infrastructure problems and energy shortage, will now be faced with increased cost of funds and

working capital shortage.

On the other hand, commercial importers will also be hit hard and most of them are likely to be eliminated, as their products would not be able to compete with the goods smuggled into the country.

They strongly felt that direct and induced effects of the higher margin requirement should have been analysed more carefully keeping in view its impact on trade and industry, new investment, inflation and employment.

MCCI President Latifur Rahman said the BB step would definitely have a negative impact on the overall economy of the country, reduce revenue income, encourage smuggling and increase cost. Both industrialists and people at grassroots level will be directly affected by the circular, he said.

"We do not find any commercial

reason behind the issuance of the circular. The government imposed the restriction without confessing the shortage of foreign currency reserve, which is not fair," he said and added that the new step will obstruct the current economic growth of the country.

If there is shortage of foreign currency reserves the authorities should take proper steps to address it, but this type of wrong steps might adversely affect the economy.

Referring to a meeting of different chamber leaders with the International Monetary Fund yesterday, he said the IMF has also expressed surprise over the BB circular.

He demanded immediate withdrawal of the circular for the betterment of the country's economy and people.

FICCI President Waliur Rahman Bhuiyan said the gov-

ernment's step is contrary to the current liberalised policy and would certainly enhance the price of finished goods and widen overall revenue deficit.

Replying to a question, he said although the BB claimed that the new measure is temporary, it is not clear how long the circular will remain effective.

DCCI President Aftab ul Islam said the finance minister had claimed two days ago that the economy is very good; then why the government imposed the restriction? The circular is completely contradictory to the finance minister's claim, he added.

On a question about excessive import of less essential items, he said the market would determine which items are essential and which are not. No importer will import such an item that has no market, he added.

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