

Please get your facts right

Yesterday on the sacred floor of the parliament, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the House made a stunning accusation.

While speaking on the President's speech, she claimed before a shocked audience that the editor of The Daily Star had deliberately briefed his reporter to ask her a question regarding the possibility of the resignation of the President, and then editorially criticised her for the reply.

"What sort of journalism is it?" she asked.

"What sort of facts are you dealing with?" we ask.

Honourable Prime Minister, for your kind information, The Daily Star reporter DID NOT ASK THE QUESTION that you refer to. Obviously, therefore, the question of the Editor briefing him does not arise. Our reporter, who clearly identified himself, had asked you about the incident in the High Court and your forthcoming meeting with the Five senior lawyers. The 'question' about which you have accused this paper was asked by the reporter of another paper.

We humbly suggest that you ask your officials why they fed you this wrong information?

Why have you caused this embarrassment to you as a person, and to your office by feeding you falsehood. You are fully entitled to criticise us, as we are duty bound to comment on your performance. However, neither of us are entitled to manufacture "facts". For your sake, and for the sake of your exalted office please get your facts right.

(See our commentary tomorrow for a more detailed reaction to the PM's 'accusation')

- Editor

Prime Minister blasts The Daily Star on wrong information

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in a speech to the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday blasted The Daily Star and accused it of planting a question in her last press conference about the possibility of resignation of the President and then writing a critical editorial on her remarks in this regard.

She claimed that the Editor had earlier briefed his correspondent to ask the question about the President as part of his plan to write an editorial in which he could criticise her.

However, the PM's angry accusations were based on complete misinformation. The question about the President was not asked by the reporter of this paper but by a reporter of Bangla daily Dinkal.

At the JS session yesterday, the prime minister castigated the Editor for what she said deliberately provoking her to speak on the issue on one hand and preaching to her on the other.

"What kind of journalism is it?" an angry prime minister told the House referring to a Star editorial on her recent remarks about the President.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Jt Inspection Team visits Naf border today

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The Joint Inspection Team of Bangladesh and Myanmar is due to meet today and visit both banks of the Naf river to assess the situation in the border areas in an attempt to defuse tension between the two countries.

The 17-member Bangladesh side in the team is led by Joint Secretary (Political) of the Ministry of Home Affairs Janibul Huq and the Myanmar side comprises 16 members led by the DDG of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The Bangladesh side includes Shah Muhammad Ali, Director General of South East Asia desk at the foreign ministry, a representative of Bangladesh Rifles, land sur

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Foreign ministry takes NBR for a ride

Probe into alleged sale of cars imported through diplomatic channel uncertain

RAFIQ HASAN

Officials of the National Board of Revenue are surprised at the way the Ministry of Foreign Affairs handled a letter from the NBR seeking permission for investigation into alleged corrupt practices centring sale of cars imported through diplomatic channel.

NBR Chairman Zakir Ahmed Khan sent the letter to the foreign ministry on December 3 also requesting it to provide required documents and cooperate with the investigators.

Sources concerned said that instead of taking any step in this regard, the foreign ministry simply sent a copy of the letter to the Ministry of Communications.

Referring to that letter, a deputy secretary of the communications ministry sent a letter to Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) for cooperating and providing required documents to the NBR.

NBR officials do not know the latest development while BRTA sources told this correspondent they do not have any documents regarding registration or import of cars for foreign diplomats.

The sources further said registration of cars belonging to diplomats lies with the foreign ministry and permission for sale of those to local people is

also given by it.

The foreign ministry issues tax exemption certificate when a diplomat wants to import a car for his official or personal use. He also needs clearance from the ministry if he wants to sell it to a local person, they mentioned.

The sources also said that following clearance from the ministry and payment of necessary duties and taxes, BRTA gives registration for such cars for use by a local people. It does not keep any record of the number of such cars.

NBR officials suspect that a significant number of cars imported through diplomatic channel without paying duties and taxes are being sold to local people depriving the government of a huge amount of revenue.

A preliminary estimate by the NBR showed that payment of around Tk 50 crore in duties and taxes was evaded this way in the last five years.

When contacted, an official of the foreign ministry also expressed surprise that the NBR letter was sent to the communications ministry.

Some NBR sources said a section of foreign ministry officials might be involved in the corrupt practices regarding diplomats' cars.



The Bangladesh Group Theatre Federation brought out a procession in the city yesterday, welcoming repeal of the Drama Control Act 1876.

11-party alliance calls hartal today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal is scheduled to begin this morning at the call of the left leaning 11-Party Alliance.

It called the shutdown to protest rise of terrorism and fundamentalism, corruption and plunder of national wealth by the present rulers and price hike of essentials.

The hartal call was given in December last year. Later, the alliance incorporated in the demand the trial of persons responsible for the January 20 bomb blast at a rally of the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB).

The alliance brought out torch processions in different areas of the city yesterday evening in support of the shutdown.

Leaders of the alliance at a meeting at the CPB office yesterday reviewed preparations for the hartal.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

BNP to hold 400 meetings, processions in 2 months

"Ambitious" plan to mobilise public support

BY REZAUL KARIM

BNP has chalked up an "ambitious" plan to hold some 400 public meetings and mass processions across the country over the next two months to mobilise people's support as well as to intensify the anti-government campaign.

According to party sources, BNP will organise public rallies at all 300 constituencies and district headquarters in February and March.

"Although it sounds ambitious, the party is determined to implement the plan at any cost as the national election is just round the corner," a senior BNP leader said while talking to The Daily Star.

He said the Awami League government might try to catch the BNP off guard by resigning and

announcing early polls. "But we will not give Awami League the chance to defeat us by hatching any evil design."

BNP is now considering mass procession as an alternative to hartal and has decided not to go for any destructive activities as the AL did during the BNP regime, he said. "BNP is hopeful of winning the next election through massive campaign against the government."

During the two-month campaign, the BNP would highlight the government's "corruption, misdeeds, misrule, repression, etc." Each rally would be followed by mass procession.

At the instruction of Khaleda Zia, the central leadership has already initiated contact with the district leaders and party MPs to finalise dates of the meetings in their

respective district and constituencies.

Khaleda, however, is highly unlikely to attend all the meetings except a few. She leaves for the United States in the first week of February.

Top-ranking leaders including Professor AQM Badruzza Chowdhury, M Saifur Rahman, Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Khandaker Delwar Hossain, Barrister Moudud Ahmed, Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Oli Ahmed and Tariqul Islam will address the rallies and lead the processions.

The campaign starts from the first week of this month and the tour is expected to begin from greater Mymensingh, sources said. Maximum number of public rallies will be organised in February.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Opposition out to grab power thru' disorder, anarchy

Hasina tells Jatiya Sangsad

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the people to foil any opposition conspiracy to grab power through disorder and anarchy.

"Stand alert against those evil forces who don't have faith in democracy, trust in people or ballot. Failing in politics and movement they want to capture power through

perverse means, through terrorism," she said winding up discussions on the President's New Year address to Parliament.

Hasina said people would never respond to the opposition's call for mass upsurge as these parties were thrown out by the people in 1971, 1990 and in 1996 through war, upsurge and ballot.

Amidst thumping of desks, Hasina said Awami League could

never be unseated through mass upsurge or election. Rather, Awami League was removed through carnage, but came back to power with people's mandate.

In her 85-minute valedictory speech, the Prime Minister repeatedly cautioned the people against the opposition's design against the next vote.

The Prime Minister said none

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Syed Muazzem Ali takes over as Foreign Secy

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Syed Muazzem Ali yesterday took over as the new Foreign Secretary. He succeeds CM Shafi Sami.

Born in Sylhet on July 18, 1944, Ali obtained Master's Degree from Dhaka University in 1966, securing First Class. He joined the erstwhile Pakistan Foreign Service in 1968.

While posted in the Pakistan Embassy in Washington DC, he declared his allegiance to the Bangladesh government-in-exile on August 4, 1971.

He remained in Washington till May 1975.

He held important positions in Bangladesh missions in Poland, India, Saudi Arabia and was also Counsellor at the Permanent Mission at the UN and Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

Ali was ambassador to Bhutan from January 1991 to April 1992. He was ambassador to Iran from May 1995 to October 1998 with concurrent accreditation to Syria, Lebanon and Turkmenistan.

He was ambassador to France from October 1998 with concurrent accreditation to UNESCO.

Ali was promoted to the rank of Secretary in December 1999.

Filtered facts about arsenic filters

World Bank MD given a wrong impression about BAMWSP project

NAIMUL HAQ, back from Pabna

A visiting team of the World Bank has been given a wrong impression about the ongoing Bangladesh Arsenic Mitigation Water Supply Project (BAMWSP), which is partially funded by the bank.

Presenting one of its 'achievements' in Ruppur village in Pabna on Sunday, BAMWSP Project Director Farid Uddin Ahmed told Shengman Zheng, managing director of the WB group who leaves today after a five-day official tour, that the on-trial filters has proved effective.

However, villagers complained to Ahmed that the filter to remove arsenic from tube-well water, proved ineffective in the end.

Introduced by Tetrahedron Incorporate, the filter, put on trial since June last year, has proved useless, local BAMWSP officials said.

Abdul Gafur and his two daughters informed this correspondent that they had stopped using the filtered water because it still contained arsenic. Several people, engaged in testing contaminated waters, backed their statement. Ten filters have provided the same results, project officials said.

Jikrul Islam, an official of the local BAMWSP support organisation, said that he had been 'instructed' to be all praise about the filter in front of Zheng and his team.

"On Saturday, one of the portfolio officers told me to say exactly what the

Dhaka office had instructed," he said, "but instead I told officials in Bangla that the filter was not really benefiting us."

However, while translating, Ahmad simply distorted Islam's version. Zheng refused to make any comment on the project when approached by this correspondent after the site inspection.

Frederic Temple, the WB country director in Bangladesh, said that the bank would make an assessment of the project's progress very soon.

Temple, and other officials of BAMWSP, accompanied Zheng during his visit to Ruppur under Paksey union, one of the most affected villages in Pabna where almost one-third of the 1,478 tube-wells are arsenic contaminated.

The WB has provided US\$34 million out of US\$ 44 million for the first phase of the project that started in February 1999.

The BAMWSP, also financed by the Swiss Development Co-operation and the government of Bangladesh, has stuttered along from its very start, say sources.

The 15-year project, which is aimed at addressing the country's ground-water arsenic contamination problem, improving understanding of the extent of the situation, strengthening implementation capacity of the local government institutions and community-based organisation, and provid

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Textbook crisis continues

Pustaka now plans to engage small printers

STAR REPORT

Availability of the rest 46 categories of textbooks out 60 for secondary level is still uncertain as Pustaka, a Beximco concern, is yet to start printing of most of those, sources concerned said.

Pustaka is now thinking to distribute the work among some small printers, the sources said.

It was given the job of printing and distributing over two crore textbooks for secondary level.

Last week, it started distribution of 14 textbooks without paying royalty to the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). But market sources said there is a crisis of textbooks in the city and other parts of the country.

The sources said Pustaka so far bought only about 2000 tonnes of paper for printing the secondary level books. But it needs at least 5000 tonnes to complete the job, they said.

Pustaka would not be able to

print and distribute the rest 46 books even if it takes immediate steps, the sources claimed.

According to the tender schedule, Pustaka was supposed to complete distribution of the textbooks by November last year.

The NCTB extended the time limit twice and the last date was December 31.

No official of Pustaka was available for comment despite repeated attempts yesterday.

One gets life term, other freed in Lockerbie trial

Libya urged to pay US\$ 700m to relatives of victims

AFP, London

The British government demanded Wednesday that Libya "take full responsibility" for the December 1988 Lockerbie bombing and pay 700 million dollars compensation to relatives of the victims.

Prime Minister Tony Blair is "glad justice has been done," a Downing Street spokesman said after one of two Libyans accused of the mid-air bombing, which killed 270 people, was found guilty.

A second Libyan was acquitted by the court in the Netherlands.

"We expect Libyan authorities to take full responsibility for the action of their official," the spokesman added. "The verdict confirms our long-standing suspicion that Libyan officials instigated the bombing."

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Libyan Abdel Basset Ali el-Megrahi (R) was sentenced to life in prison while compatriot Al-Amin Khalifa Fhimah (L) was acquitted.

Two stabbed to death in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Two persons were stabbed to death in separate incidents in the city yesterday.

The victims were identified as Abul Kalam, 35, son of Abdul Khaleq Master of East Kazipara, Mirpur and Nirmal Chandra, 40, son of Debendranath, Baburghat under Barisal district.

Police said some youths called Abul Kalam, a cut piece trader, out of a furniture shop at East Kazipara at about 12:30 pm, took him to a nearby place and stabbed him mercilessly. He died on the spot.

Police recovered the body at about 1:50 pm and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. There were marks of stab injury in the victim's head, hands and back.

Mirpur police said Abul Kalam was a victim of rivalry between two terrorist groups in the area. He was a member of Kafrul-based gang 'Jewel' group and involved in various criminal activities including toll collection.

Two separate criminal cases are pending with Kafrul thana against him, police said.

A murder case was filed with Mirpur thana in this connection. In another incident, a gang of extortionists halted Nirmal Chandra Das near the Waiz Ghat in Kotwali thana and demanded money from him yesterday morning.

As he refused to oblige, the gang stabbed him.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

INSIDE TODAY

ARTICLE 4

Davos days

Ikrum Sehgal writes from Karachi

FOCUS 5

Asian values and a timely lesson for Bangladesh

BUSINESS 6-7

BB govt stirs up new thought about rate-development link

	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Feb 1		5.45 pm
Feb 2	6-39 am	

Prayer Timings

February 1		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fazr	5-30	6-10
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-015	4-30
Maghrib	5-40	5-45
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation