

Identify those tarnishing image of Islam, PM urges Ulema

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the Ulema-e-Keram (religious leaders) to identify those tarnishing the image of Islam.

She told the Ulema-e-Keram that the religious extremists were using the noble religion Islam for their personal gains.

"They are in fact causing damage to Islam, which is a religion of peace

and harmony," she said, adding that the misdeeds of a few vested-interest groups are slandering the whole Ulema community.

"You will have to identify these vested-interest groups in the greater interest of the religion of humanity," she told the religious leaders who called on her at ICC yesterday.

Referring to the killing of a police constable in the mosque, she said those who are resorting to killing in

the name of religion are the real enemies of Islam.

"For their misdeeds people are getting a bad idea about this great religion. You will have to remain alert so that the huge number of Ulema-e-Keram and peace-loving Muslims cannot be pushed into trouble."

Hasina said there had been propaganda against Awami League since the inception of the party. Opposition parties said if Awami

League could come to power, then Islam would be endangered.

"But in fact Awami League is the real friend of Islam and doing everything possible for the development and spread of this great religion."

She mentioned that the government had taken steps for the development of Islamic Foundation, introduced mosque-based education and taken steps for development of Madrassahs and Imams of

the country.

The Prime Minister said the government had taken steps for the development of Baitul Mukarram national mosque and for reaching the teachings of Islam to the people.

She announced that the government would also take a special project to institute a welfare fund for Imams of the country.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

B'baria remains tense: Another injured dies

STAR REPORT

A tense situation prevailed at Brahmanbaria throughout yesterday with scores of madrassah students picketing for the dawn-to-dusk hartal called by the four-party opposition alliance.

Twenty people were arrested so far, eight of them under the Public Safety Act (PSA), following Tuesday's violence that left six persons killed in police-BDR firing here. Clashes between police-BDR and Islamic zealots on the day also left more than 100 people injured.

Amid the presence of heavy contingents of BDR and armed police, hundreds of people attended the janaja and burial of four of those in the town yesterday. Two others were buried elsewhere. Another injured, Mukhles, died yesterday raising the toll to seven.

Security personnel prevented people of adjacent villages from entering the town where hartal was observed on the day.

Maulana Sirajul Islam, the 120-year-old Principal of Jamia Yunusia (a private Islamic institution) is leading the youths who clashed with police and BDR on Tuesday. They were protesting the arrest of IOJ leaders Azizul Haq and Fazlul Haq Amini in Dhaka, the High Court

verdict on fatwa and "Anti-Islamic Activities of NGOs".

District administration officials said yesterday that they were "helpless" in the face of violent protests by hundreds of madrassah students on Tuesday. Only 30 BDR personnel and 150 policemen were posted at different points in the town on the day and they were forced to open fire.

The officials further said hundreds of youths attacked security men with brickbats. At two points, they also came under gunfire in which a police constable was injured. Angry students and followers of Sirajul Islam caught Sub-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

PM to brief editors today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Editors of different national dailies and news agencies will meet Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office at 10.30 am today.

The Prime Minister will meet the editors as part of her regular quarterly briefing. She is likely to discuss the recent political developments and the law and order situation.

One of the two bodies remains trapped inside a derailed compartment of Udayan Express (top), Communications Minister Anwar Hossain being carried across a stretch of mud to the accident spot (middle) and police taking the alleged saboteur Mazharul Islam into custody at Feni for interrogation (inset).

PHOTO: STAR

US to respond quickly in case of any disaster

Maj Gen Waskow tells The Daily Star

M ANWARUL HAQ

The United States Air Force will be in a position to respond promptly to any call for disaster management assistance in Bangladesh, should a request be made.

"In times of humanitarian crisis, it would depend on the request of your government to seek assistance, and I feel the U.S. government would be quick to provide support."

This was told by Major General Thomas C Waskow, director of air and space operations based at the Hickam Air Force Base at the US Pacific Command in Hawaii while talking to The Daily Star.

The US Air Force general is attending the three-day Pacific Rim Conference of Director Operations in Dhaka. The conference, the third outside the United States, has been organised jointly by the Bangladesh Air Force and the US Pacific Air Force. Twenty-two delegates and

Maj Gen Thomas Waskow

six observers from 15 countries are participating in the conference inaugurated on Tuesday by Air Vice Marshal Jamal Uddin Ahmed.

Asked how the Pacific command

would make a quick response to a crisis call, Waskow said the Pacific Command (PACOM) would send a team to assess the type of disaster mission that would come in.

"We'd be ready to dispatch humanitarian and medical assistance by air, depending on what the government would ask for," said the air force general.

The last disaster operation carried out by the US military in Bangladesh was named "Operation Sea Angels" after the 1991-cyclone.

He said his command would also deploy a team of communications experts so that they could help maintain the aircraft flights. Most of the aircraft would be taking off from Guam and carry out refuelling in the air during a crisis mission.

General Waskow who has logged more than 4,300 flight hours has held several important positions. He also worked as chief of L o n g - R a n g e

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

3 arrested accuse disclose

Khateeb opened gate of the mosque with key

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Khateeb of Noor Masjid Maulana Monsoor kept the key of the mosque gate while police constable Badsha Mia was killed inside it at Mohammadpur in the city Saturday afternoon.

This was disclosed by the three arrested accused in the murder case during interrogation yesterday, police sources said. The three are Humayn Kabir, Akram Hossain and Hizbullah.

They confessed that khateeb Monsur opened the gate with the key while constable Badsha Mia was dragged inside by Islamic zealots. Monsur then locked the gate.

But the three were yet to disclose the identities of the culprits who beat the cop to death. They continued to stand by their earlier statements that due to a huge crowd and chaos on the mosque premises, they could not identify those who beat Badsha Mia.

Yesterday was the last day of their three-day remand. They will be produced before the CMM's court today.

The sources said police are likely to pray for their fresh remand as none of them has recorded judicial statement under Section 164 of CrPC.

The names of Monsoor and at least three others may be added to the list of 37 accused in the case. The three are Imam of Noor Masjid A b u

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

JP plans hartal on Sunday for Ershad's release

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Party is planning to call a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on Sunday to press for the release of its jailed Chairman HM Ershad and is trying to pursue the BNP-led opposition alliance to announce it on its behalf.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

HR activist Asma Jahangir says Democratic movement by Bangladeshis a model for Pakistanis

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

A leading Pak human rights activist said Bangladesh's struggle for democracy was a matter of great inspiration for the people of Pakistan.

Asma Jahangir, an icon of human rights in South Asia, was addressing a press conference at the Muktiyuddha Jadughar yesterday, with editor of Prothom Alo, Matiur Rahman as moderator. Jadughar member-secretary Akku Chowdhury was also present.

"Your concerted efforts for restoration of democracy is both a lesson and an inspiration for us. Besides, the people of Bangladesh have ushered in beneficial changes affecting the economic, political and social fabric," said the celebrated activist.

Asma, also a lawyer, is a former chairman of the Human

Rights Commission of Pakistan and special coordinator of United Nations for Genocide. She said the people of Bangladesh had established themselves as a model not only for spearheading democratic movements, but for establishing women's rights as well.

"Your having a non-partisan president and people like the two judges who banned fatwa is also a matter of inspiration for the people of Pakistan," Asma Jahangir said.

Asma, however, cautioned that "Bangladesh needs to consolidate democracy to check the rise of fundamentalism."

The human rights activist said it was a matter of satisfaction that the people of Bangladesh wanted history to be read correctly.

Asma Jahangir said, "The truth of 1971 haunts us all specially after the

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Landslide victory for Sharon

JERUSALEM, Reuters

Ariel Sharon, an arch-hawk reviled by Arabs swept to a landslide victory in Israel's prime ministerial election, plunging the Middle East peace process into deep uncertainty.

Results showed Sharon had won 62.5 per cent of votes cast compared to Barak's 37.4 per cent with results in from 99.9 per cent of the polling stations. Final results will be

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Biman's consultant now proposes alliance with financial investor

SHEHAB AHMED

The Citibank group of New York, privatisation consultant for Bangladesh Biman, has proposed an alliance with a financial investment company having ties with airlines, instead of looking for a strategic partner (SP) which would buy its 40 per cent stake.

The consultant sent its latest proposal following poor response from reputed airlines to become a SP of the Biman under a two million dollar World Bank aided commercialisation and restructuring programme, Biman sources said.

Since the national carrier invited a Request for Proposal (RFP) from reputed airlines by December 2 last year with the time-limit extended till January 7, it received only two proposals. The Gulf Air and Qatar Airways gave the written offers and others showed initial interest.

But the Gulf Air recently wrote to the Biman that they were putting the RFP on hold since it had a change in management.

Biman had a meeting with the Citibank late last month to review the situation. Although the consultant assured that it was seeking partners for Biman, it offered a new strategy. The financial investment company would play the key role in the restructuring of Biman but in association with an airline or airlines as joint investor.

The consultant also pointed out that the time for taking a decision on conversion of Biman into a public limited company from its current status as a corporation was a deterrent in attracting major airlines to tie up with Biman as a SP.

Besides, their keen interest in buying 34 per cent stake in the Air India, a major Asian airline, reduced their interest in a tie up with Biman.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6