

AL peace procession in city against hartal

BSS, Dhaka

Hundreds of activist of Bangladesh Awami League and its front organisations yesterday brought out several 'anti-hartal peace procession' in the capital denouncing shutdown imposed by the religious fanatics with support from BNP-led opposition alliance.

City Awami League general secretary and State Minister for Shipping Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya, Bir Bikram, led the procession from its Bangabandhu Avenue office protesting the anti-people hartal, terrorism, anarchy, fatwa, and urged people to safeguard country's independence and democracy from evil designs of anti-liberation forces.

The procession paraded different city streets and areas including Nour Hossain Square, Paltan Square, Topkhana Road, Jatiya Press Club and the procession concluded at Muktangan.

In a brief rally after the procession at Muktangan, Maya said BNP chief Begum Khaleda Zia is patronising country's religious fanatics responsible for deliberately desecrating the holy Quran by killing an innocent constable inside the mosque. He said people would never forgive them for their heinous crimes and anti-Islamic activities.

The state minister said Khaleda Zia and her allies were involved in the killing of policeman and train passengers near Feni by uprooting

the rail track. They are also responsible for the deaths of innocent people by calling frequent hartals.

The hartal call by the Islamic Oikya Jote and Islami Shashantanra Andolan under the banner of "Islamic Law Implementation Committee" and supported by the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance to press home the demand of the release of Moulana Azizul Haque and Mufti Fazlul HuqAmini.

They are facing charges of killing an on-duty police constable, Badsha Mia, inside a mosque during hartal hours on February 3 under Public Safety Act.

Among others, AL leader Siddiqur Rouf Khan, Prof Fazlul Haque, Aktarul Alam, Advocate Kazi Iqbal Hossain, Riazuddin Ahmed, Aktarul Alam, Salahuddin Badal, Dr Salam, Abdul Haq Sabuj, former student leader Iqbalur Rahim, Kamruzzaman Ansari, Enamul Haq Shamim, Ishak Ali Khan Panna took part in the procession.

Besides, Bangladesh Awami Shechchasebok League, Joybangla Sanskritik Jote, Bangladesh Muktiyoddha Janata League, Bangladesh Hawkers League, Bangabandhu Jatiya Jubo Parishad brought out separate peace processions in different parts of the capital like Shyamoly, Agargaon, Asad Gate, Dhanmondi, Russel Square, Lalmitiya, Satmasjid Road, Kataras, Tajmahal Road, Mirpur, Pallabi and old part of the city.

Asma condemns

West Pakistan on a member of occasions.

Lauding the leadership of Sheikh Hasina, Asma said, "I noticed that you have fought for democracy and reestablished fundamental rights of the people." She also appreciated the development achieved in different sectors of the country under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina.

The prime minister said she had fought a long time to establish people's rights against all the regimes that captured state power after the assassination of Bangabandhu along with most of his family members in 1975.

"There was no democracy in the country under the successive regimes that had captured power after the 1975 tragedy as power was lying in the cantonment," she said.

The prime minister underscored the need for establishing peace in the South Asian region, terming peace as an essential element for people's welfare.

She said she had been struggling relentlessly to sustain democracy.

Rangamati

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the fight," one source said here quoting local people.

The two groups clashed as a sequel to Tuesday's gun battle that left six injured.

Although police expressed their ignorance about the gunfight, other intelligence agencies confirmed it.

Kibria

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Rahman, additional secretary (banking) Dr Shoaib Ahmed, bank's director Mohiuddin Ahmed and deputy managing director Shamsul Islam Bhuiyan also addressed the function.

The finance minister, however, sounded a note of caution that market shares of the NCBs squeezed and would reduce further. He called upon the bankers to rethink about upgrading operations of the NCBs to international levels.

Reminding the bankers of corruption being practised for long with a chain effect, he advised them to eschew any malpractice in future.

"You give up corrupt practices and resist others from doing that."

Janata Bank chairman Dr Atiur Rahman said many of the powerful defaulters would try to put pressure on the management for rescheduling their over due loans.

Derailed train

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Act and Section 126 of Railway Act against those who were allegedly involved in removing the fish-plates.

The accused are Hafez Mazharul Islam, Hafez Saidul Haque, Ismail Hossain Hujur, Chhatra Shibir activists Morshed, Sharif and Ilias and eight unidentified youths.

One of them, Hafez Mazharul Islam was arrested on Wednesday. He will be produced before Choudhagram Magistrate Court today (Friday).

Three of the injured are undergoing treatment at Feni Hospital. They are out of danger, hospital sources said. The rest left the hospital after treatment.

Railway Inspector M Abdullah will visit Gunabati Station on Feb 12 and Laksam Station Feb 13-14 for investigating the accident. The train accident occurred near Gunabati in Feni district.

Bangladesh Railway in a press release yesterday requested passengers and witnesses to be present there and provide information to the investigating officer.

JMBA

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ing is yet to take place, the GTCL official said.

When contacted, JMBA Secretary Syed Marghub Morshed said he was not aware of the matter. He said he would investigate it.

He however mentioned that the government appointed an international consortium company -- JOMAC -- for maintenance of the bridge.

Besides, some areas on the eastern side of Jamuna Bridge have been leased out to a private company -- Jamuna Resort Limited -- to make the area an attractive tourist spot, Morshed said.

Other sources said the Jamuna Resort is owned by Progati Insurance Company.

Former FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo owns majority shares of the insurance company.

German envoy visits Tipu

UNB, Dhaka

A foreign diplomat yesterday said the attack on life of journalist Tipu Sultan was a threat to democracy.

German Ambassador UWE Schramm, while visiting Tipu at the Orthopedic Hospital yesterday evening, also expressed his concern over the threat to Tipu's family by the miscreants.

AL unveils campaign

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ing "eligible and dedicated" party men in the next election.

The recent violence let loose by Islamic fanatics also came up prominently for discussion. Many grassroots level leaders gave their opinion in favour of taking a tough stand against them.

The central leadership urged them to project the government's patronisation of madrasah education and work for development of mosques and religious institutions.

At the meeting, the representatives were given prescribed forms to fill those, giving details about their respective district committees. They were told that ALECC would supply all campaign logistics including booklets, cassettes and posters.

On intra-party conflicts, the meeting was informed that party chief Sheikh Hasina was having separate meetings with each of the 70 district committees and that this would continue.

Sharon

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He indicated his willingness to partially relinquish Israeli sovereignty over a disputed hilltop in the Old City of Jerusalem, where the Al Aqsa Mosque compound was built above the ruins of the biblical Jewish Temples, a site sacred to Muslims and Jews and claimed by both.

The Palestinians said Barak's proposals did not go far enough, but were engaged in intense negotiations with Israel last month, before Israeli voters turned Barak out of office this week by a huge margin, 62.5 per cent to 37.4 per cent.

Sharon's aides said the Barak ideas are off the table. Demonstrating his resolve to change the nature of the Israel-Palestinian relationship, Sharon visited the Western Wall, sacred to Jews as the retaining wall of the disputed hilltop holy site. He declared that all of Jerusalem would remain united under Israeli rule, "with the Temple Mount at its center for all eternity," using the Jewish name for the site.

No need for emergency: PM

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actually want? When there will be elections after a few months, what they want by removing the government through undemocratic means," she asked.

She said instead of inciting violence, the opposition should spell out their programmes to the people and let the people decide and cast their vote in a free and impartial environment.

Replying to a question about the timing of parliament election, which the opposition is demanding immediately, the Prime Minister said elections would be held "timely, as soon as possible."

She urged the editors to help advance democratic process against politics of violence and terrorism.

About current spate of violence, unleashed by Islamic fundamental-

ists, the Prime Minister said only a handful of such elements indulged in it and urged the ulema-mashaek and pirs to identify them so that innocent god-fearing people and ulema are not victimised.

"Ulema-mashaek and Islamic scholars must identify these elements, drive them out of mosques and madrassahs. Why the entire ulema community would be blamed for a few people misusing Islam to satisfy their political purpose? How bombs could be used in mosques?" Hasina assured the editors that her government was taking steps very cautiously and asked the police to be careful so that the innocent is not harassed.

She, however, deplored that the leader of the opposition is giving shelter to the man who killed police Constable Badsha Mia and took him (Shaikhul Hadith) by her own car to address public meeting.

About the extremist plan for Taliban-style revolution, Hasina said Bangladesh would never be a mullah state. People here are god-fearing but not fanatic. Accusing the

BNP-led 4-party alliance of fomenting communalism by exploiting the religious sentiment of the people, she said: "They have their strength in bombs, we have ours in people."

The Prime Minister praised a firm and clear stand of newspapers for the spirit of liberation war and non-communal environment.

Asked about a reported discord between her and the President, whom she met Wednesday evening, Hasina retorted: "I didn't have any such... the President is alright..."

Asked about speculation about his resignation, she said: "Why the President will resign? There is no reason for resignation."

About her meeting with him at Bangabhaban yesterday, she said it was a good meeting when she apprised him of the outcome of the AAPP conference held in Cambodia.

To a question about unabated terrorist acts in Feni where a journalist was tortured recently by the terrorist band of a ruling party MP, the Prime Minister said action would be taken if he was involved in the

incident. She said the government is inquiring about the newsman, and if necessary, he would be sent abroad for treatment.

She, however, questioned why only Joynal Hazari's name would come up time and again in Feni where at least 55 leaders and workers of Awami League were killed by their opponents. Naming BNP leader VP Jainul who was arrested with 17 arms, Hasina questioned why the newspapers do not write against him, why they remain silent, targeting only one person.

About terrorism under political shelter, the Prime Minister said her government had taken tough action against her own party men. She said if all political parties take a firm and united decision against terrorism, then the nation could be free of terrorism.

When an editor asked for singling out one weakness of her rule amidst so many achievements, the Prime Minister frankly admitted that it is the problem of terrorism.

Classifying terrorists, she said there are fundamentalist terrorists, opposition terrorists, born terrorists and some terrorists who always remain with the party in power.

"Although I have been successful in tackling terrorism to a large extent, still I feel that this is the area where much needs to be done for improvement."

Hasina said following the enactment of the Public Safety Act, law and order improved much bringing down the crime rate by 60 to 65 per cent. "If we could return to power for the next term, we would give priority to stamping out terrorism root and branch."

Replying to a question about reforms of electoral laws, the Prime Minister said her government had discussed the matter with past Chief Election Commissioner, but there are certain sensitive issues like registration of political parties. If it is done all of a sudden, there would be an outcry and the EC might come under criticism.

"In any case we want more

PM again accuses the Star, wrongly

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she had said.

The paper, on the following day, published an editor's note clarifying that it was not the Star reporter who asked the question but the reporter from Dainik Dinkal, an opposition paper, linked to BNP.

The next day, the editor in a signed commentary once again explained what happened at the press conference of 26th January, and urged the PM to check the video and audio recordings of the event to ascertain the facts, and not to accuse the Star on wrong information.

We publish below a chronology of the questions asked to the PM in the press conference up to the question of the Star reporter:

Questions by Mokhesur Rahman Chowdhury of Dainik Dinkal

Q.1. Is there any move to reactivate the SAARC and develop its links with the ASEAN?

Q.2. Please comment on the press report that the President may consider resigning?

Question by Anis Alamgir of Aajker Kagoj

Q.1. What is your view on the Home Minister's comment that AL government will continue even after its five years in power to make up for the working days lost in hartal.

Questions by Shamim Ahmed of UNB

Q.1. What is your view regarding BNP's demand for the dissolution of the parliament?

Q.2. Is there any possibility of early resignation by the AL government?

Q.3. What do you think of the opposition's threat of a mass upsurge?

Questions by Nadim Quader of AFP

Q.1. What are your views about the bomb explosion in the CPB rally?

Q.2. What steps have been taken to expedite the investigation of the case?

Q.3. What steps have been taken to arrest the culprits?

Question by Nazmul Ashraf of The Daily Star

Q.1. What are your views about the vandalism in the premises of the Supreme Court?

Q.2. When will you meet the five senior lawyers trying to resolve the Supreme Court issue?

(There were several other questions afterwards.)

During her speech in the parliament, on 31st, five days after the event, the PM said that the Star had asked the question dealing with the President. Yesterday she said that we asked a supplementary question. The above chronology shows that there were at least seven questions, asked by three different reporters, representing three different news organisations, between the question referring to the President and that asked by the Star reporter. Therefore there cannot be any chance of linking the Star

reporter with the question regarding the President.

We wrote earlier, requesting the PM to check the record of her press office or the tapes of Bangladesh Betar (radio) or the BTV or of the PID which maintains a full record of PM's press conferences. Obviously nothing of the sort was done to clarify the issue.

Our chronology was prepared from our records and after talking to at least 15 of the reporters present on the occasion. Almost two weeks after the event the PM continues her accusations against this newspaper on wrong information. Why? When will this end?

Opposition calls hartal in Ctg on Sunday

UNB, Ctg

The four-party opposition alliance has called for daylong hartal in Chittagong on Sunday (February 11) demanding release of BNP joint secretary Abu Sufian.

The hartal was announced from a rally at Kazir Dewri square yesterday afternoon by district BNP president Meer Mohammad Nasiruddin.

In the wake of a quake

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Defence Secretary has been formed to chart out a strategy to meet such a situation. It will submit a report in two months, he said.

The Housing and Public Works Ministry has been instructed to prepare a booklet containing the building code and relevant laws for adherence and enforcement.

The Director General of the Disaster Management Bureau has been asked to prepare an inventory of rescue equipment with different organisations including Fire Brigade, PWD, Roads and Highways and the army and to submit a report in one month.

This will help coordination among rescue agencies in tackling any emergency situation in the wake of a quake, he said. "We are going to meet again in two months to review the situation", he added.

Meanwhile, the Meteorological Department has been asked to give priority to procurement of equipment to set up three more seismic

observatories in Dhaka, Sylhet and Rangpur. It will also upgrade its Chittagong centre so that it can record quake and locate its epicentre, its Director Anwarul Kabir said.

He said construction of observatories in Dhaka, Sylhet and Rangpur will start soon and is expected to be completed by September. Tenders will be floated in April for procurement of equipment and manpower will be recruited, he added.

Any quake above six on the Richter scale will wreck havoc in a mega city like Dhaka where nearly ten million people live and high rises are on the rise.

In building high rises, basic minimum building laws and the National Building Code, 1993 remained ignored by the builders and the RAJJK, experts say.

One of the experts, Prof Jamilur Reza Choudhury, said at a seminar on Monday that the building code should be strictly enforced as Dhaka has become one of the "most risky"

cities in the world, where hundreds of buildings will collapse in a moderate tremor.

In the last 150 years, seven major quakes affected the region where Bangladesh is located, another expert, Dr Ali Akbar Mallick said at the seminar.

In 1897, a severe quake in Assam affected parts of Sylhet, killed thousands and changed the course of Brahmaputra river.

Chittagong, Bandarban, Sylhet, Mymensingh and Rangpur fall in a 'severe quake zone' (above seven on the RS). Dhaka, Tangail, Bogra, Dinajpur, Comilla and Rangamati fall in 'moderate quake zone' (six on the RS). The rest of the country fall in the zone where tremor above six is 'highly unlikely'.

There had been 7-8 tremors last year and 13 in the previous year.

Five persons of a family died in a landslide in Moheshkhal in a tremor last year. Several buildings collapsed in a tremor in 1997, killing a number of people.

Stray incidents mark hartal

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about 10:30am.

Activists of Jubadai, BNP's youth wing, allegedly exploded several hand-bombs in Shahjahanpur and Pirjangam rack areas and damaged some rickshaws. They also damaged an auto-rickshaw carrying journalists of the Inqilab at about 10:30am.

A procession of BNP came under attack by activists of pro-government Chhatra League in front of Dhaka College at about 10:45 am. BNP leader Abdul Hye MP and Krishak Dal leader Mujibur Rahman were leading the procession.

Witnesses said some armed activists fired in the air when the BNP procession reached there. Panicked BNP men ran for safety. None however was injured in the firing.

At Badda, BNP activists damaged a bus and two auto-rickshaws at about 8 am. Pickets set ablaze two rickshaws at Tipu Sultan Road at about noon. Besides, pickets damaged an auto-rickshaw carrying reporters of the state-run BSS news agency at Kakrail crossing. They also beat its driver.

Activists of pro-AL Juba League set fire to effigies of Islami Oikhya

Jote (IOJ) Chairman Azizul Haq and Secretary General Fazlul Haq Amini at Moghbazar crossing at about 12:30 pm. AL and its front organisations brought out several anti-hartal processions in different parts of the city.

Huge contingents of police in riot gear and BDR personnel were deployed at different strategic points and they patrolled the city streets. They were active particularly in Bijoynagar, Paltan, Kakrail and Dhanmondi areas and in old parts of the city.

Movement of rickshaw was almost normal while some state-owned double decker BRTC buses and a small number of minibuses and three-wheelers plied in some specific routes in the city. Inter-district buses and trucks remained off the roads during the hartal.

Educational institutions, business houses, private offices, shops and markets remained closed. Attendance in the Secretariat, other government and semi-government offices and autonomous bodies' was less than normal.

Although the law enforcing agencies allowed activists of BNP, JP and Jamaat-e-Islami to parade the city streets in processions, they did not allow those of IOJ and other

Islamic groups to hold any rally or bring out procession. Islamic Shashantanra Andolan, however, held a brief rally in a lane near Purana Paltan Mosque.

Processions brought out by BNP in different areas of the city were led by party leaders Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, ZA Khan, Selima Rahman, Mirza Abbas, Nazrul Islam Khan, Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Abdus Salam, Amanullah Aman, Zainal Abedin Faruque, Abdul Hye, Mujibur Rahman, Shirin Sultana and Sadiya Haq.

JP Processions were led by Saifur Rahman, Abu Hossain Babla, Taiyubur rahman and Gazi Quamrul Islam Sajal while Jamaat leaders Ali Ahsan Mujahid, ATM Azharul Islam, Jashimuddin Sarkar and Rafiqul Islam Khan led their party processions.

Reports from different districts said the day-long hartal passed off almost peacefully.

Our Staff Correspondent in Chittagong reports: The dawn-to-dusk hartal was observed peacefully. All kinds of vehicles except rickshaws stayed off the roads. Delivery of goods to and from Chittagong Port remained sus-

pending but cargo handling at the jetties continued as usual.

Four pro-hartal pickets were arrested from Doublemooring area. The opposition parties and the ruling party brought out separate processions and held rallies supporting and opposing the hartal.

Our Netrokona Correspondent reported that a tense situation was prevailing at the district town as Chhatra League activists ransacked the local office of JP on Wednesday night and deployed 'armed cadres' at all the road crossings yesterday. The activists brought out a procession yesterday and they were allegedly carrying lethal weapons.

In Cox's Bazar, police arrested three persons on charge of putting up barricade on Cox's Bazar-Chittagong Highway at Kalirchhara during the hartal.

UNB reports from Khulna said chase and counter-chase between pickets and police-BDR marked the hartal. Three IOJ activists were arrested.

During the shutdown, IOJ activists brought out a 'stick procession'.

A BNP procession came under attack by anti-hartal activists at Daulatpur.

Another body recovered

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Kitchen markets, business and trading centres, banks, courts and educational institutions have remained closed since Monday. People from all walks of life have said they lost a whole week to the turbulent situation.

Eight people were killed and over 100 injured during a series of clashes between protesting madrasa students and the law-enforcement agencies on Tuesday. The students and the followers of a 120-year old religious leader Moulana Serajul Islam were protesting the arrests of several religious leaders in Dhaka recently.

As an after-effect of the four-day long shutdown, daily commodities have not only become scarce but the prices of those have plummeted in the town where about 1.5 lakh people live.

All activities in the district administrations, including judiciary were inoperative creating further backlog in the already overburdened system.

Although the situation has now become normal, religious leaders would announce a fresh programme soon, demanding 'justice' for Tuesday's victims. Moulana Serajul Islam told some reporters at his residence yesterday that they would

soon convene a meeting with 16 other religious leaders to decide what the course of action they must take.

"The police were deployed to protect the people. I want to know why my madrasa students were shot dead," complained the 120-year-old leader.

SP Sarwar Alam Sarkar said 490 policemen and BDR personnel would soon be withdrawn from the streets of the district town. "There were some protest rallies at some places of the town, but the situation is now under control."

"We have a strong evidence of outsiders' involvement in Tuesday's violence," added the SP. "We have filed cases under the PSA (Public Safety Act) against 28 people. Another case under SPA (Special Powers Act) was filed against 32 persons belonging to the BNP-led four-party alliance," Sarkar said.

Meanwhile, the undercover security men have launched an all-out surveillance operation on the activities of madrasahs and opposition parties.

The resident students of all main madrasahs have left either for their homes or elsewhere. All the dormitories have been closed since die.

Train commuting through Brahmanbaria has resumed.

Khaleda, alliance leaders to visit B'baria

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Committee held at 29 Minto Road yesterday evening. Secretaries general of the four parties attended the meeting.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan announced holding of gayebana janaja across the country after Juma prayers today for those killed in police firing at Brahmanbaria on Tuesday.

In Dhaka, the opposition will hold a gayebana janaja at Bailul Mukarram National Mosque. Later, the opposition parties will jointly bring out a mourning procession.

Meeting sources said, the JP, which made a proposal to call a countrywide hartal on Sunday to press the demand for release of HM Ershad, was outright rejected by