

Passage of Vested Property Bill hailed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad in a statement yesterday hailed the passage of the Vested Property Return Bill 2001 in Parliament.

At a rally held at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday, the Parishad leaders congratulated the Awami League government on the passage of the Bill.

Parishad president Maj Gen (Retd) C R Durr, Prof Lalit Mahan Nath, Dr Nim Chandra Bhoomik and Sukamal Barua spoke at the rally.

They said that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina initiated the process to repeal the Vested Property Act two years ago. And the MPs from AL, BNP and JP on the parliamentary standing committee on Land Ministry reached a consensus in this regard, they added.

Opposition-sponsored 72-hour hartal begins today

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To recover the loss of work in public sector, the government cancelled the weekly holiday on Saturday.

With the hartal-related violence costing at least four lives and leaving some 600 people injured in the first week of this month, there is a sense of insecurity among the people as the shutdown begins today.

Many citizens in Dhaka told this correspondent that they apprehended violence during the hartal period, especially at night.

Provocative announcements from rival political camps added to the sense of insecurity. While the Opposition warned the government of the consequence of violence, the government said the opposition will not call hartal any more if the people

take to the streets to protest 'destructive programmes'.

Meanwhile, addressing a press conference in the city yesterday, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia accused the government of resorting to repressive measures against opposition leaders and activists and trying to break unity of the four-party alliance.

Khaleda urged the people to make a success the 72-hour hartal and follow-up programmes to be announced by the alliance.

In another development, Ershad-led Jatiya Party (JP) faction, decided not to participate in the hartal. JP is a component of the alliance.

BNP brought out torch processions in different parts of the city yesterday to drum up support for the shutdown. Other partners in the combine JP faction led by Nazim

Rahman Manzur, Jamaat-e-Islami and Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ) separately urged the people to make the hartal a success.

Sources in the ruling Awami League (AL) said party units across the country would bring out processions denouncing the 'issues' hartal.

An AL lawmaker seeking anonymity said they would bring out their cars on the roads during the hartal and would encourage all transport owners and operators to maintain normal vehicular movement across the country.

The Prime Minister recently directed the district administrations to exchange views with cross sections of people to keep the districts hartal-free.

Some 6,400 policemen would be deployed in the capital to check any untoward incidents during the

hartal beginning, said sources in the Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) yesterday.

Giving a lengthy pre-hartal briefing to mid-ranking and junior-level police officials, who would be commanding different police teams in the city during hartal, the DMP Commissioner Motiur Rahman advised them to exercise utmost patience in handling every situation, said the sources.

Officials at the briefing session acknowledged that the members of the police force are left with very little time for rest as they have to work extra hours due to the standoff in national politics and prolonged hartals.

Appreciating the role of policemen, the DMP officials informed the meeting that newly recruited women police officials would also be deployed in the city

during today's hartal, the sources added.

Our Correspondent from Chittagong adds, Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCC&I) urged the administration to follow democratic norms to avoid violence.

The CCC&I in a statement yesterday also urged the opposition to have a tolerant attitude during hartal hours and to find out an alternative to hartal.

They called upon the opposition to keep 'The 9th Chittagong International Trade Fair (CITF)' out of purview of hartal.

CCC&I president Saifuzzaman Chowdhury, Senior Vice-President M Nurul Haq and Vice-president M A Laif in the statement said businessmen and industrialists have to bear all sorts of overhead expenditures including bank interests dur-

ing hartals.

BSS adds: Bangladesh Rickshaw and Autorickshaw Drivers, Owners Sangram Parishad called upon the Four-Party Opposition Alliance to withdraw their three-day hartal programme.

Leaders of the organisation at a meeting said they would be compelled to gear up the residence of Leader of the Opposition if hartal is not withdrawn.

Presidents and general secretaries of different rickshaw and autorickshaw drivers and owners associations in the capital attended the meeting at Bangabandhu Avenue with labour leader Shukkur Ahmed in the chair.

The meeting urged all drivers and owners to ply their rickshaws, auto-rickshaws and tempos in the streets and ignore hartal.

Bio-technology

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The noted scientist also said, "the scientist community wants development and we need cooperation for this from whoever is governing the country."

He said, "we do not need any foreign aid, our united efforts are enough to achieve our dreams." Presided over by secretary for Science and Technology M Fazlur Rahman, the inaugural session was also addressed, by Md Habibur Rahman Chowdhury, director of NMST and Jeyam Nahar Begum, joint secretary (Admin.), Ministry of Science and Technology.

The programme, which will be concluded on April 11, includes symposiums and exhibition.

A total of 79 educational institutes from around the country are taking part in the fair with their innovations.

The institutions were selected through a national competition, held throughout the country from January 15 to February 5.

Tigers surrender

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caving in meekly.

Only opener Javed Omar stood tall in the runs with an unbeaten 33 when the tourists lost their last wicket in the fourth ball of 31st over. The diminutive right-hander struck a sixer over square leg in his somewhat responsible knock.

Although a couple of decisions went against Bangladesh, but most of the batsmen, being oblivious to the seaming condition, were guilty at playing rash shots.

The rot started in the very first over when Al-Shahriar was adjudged leg before off Zimbabwe captain Heath Streak. But the decision only satisfied umpire Esat himself as television replay showed that the ball was going down the leg side.

Habibul Bashar struck a beautiful four over mid-wicket, but then edged Streak behind the wicket in the third over, leaving his team tottering at two for nine from where they could never recover.

Naimur Rahman tried to mend the damage with a quick-fire 25 off 21 balls that included four boundaries. But he too was not willing to build a captain's innings.

Earlier, Campbell smashed his first century against Bangladesh with the help of eight fours and a six off 145 balls after Zimbabwe lost the toss and were asked to bat. His previous best against the Test-babes was 97 in Dhaka a couple of years

back.

Most of Zimbabwe's runs came in a second-wicket stand of 133 between Campbell and Stuart Carlisle, who made 56 in 73 balls with a four and two sixes.

The home side tried to pick up the tempo in the last ten overs in front of sparse holiday crowd. And their play partly paid off, but in doing so they lost six wickets in the process.

Sharif gave Bangladesh an early breakthrough by having Whittall caught at long leg.

Pick of the Bangladesh bowling was Monjurul Islam, who finished with a career-best return of three for 37 in his 10 overs.

Naimur however continued to struggle with the ball. The off-spinner conceded 44 runs in his eight overs without any success.

"Our batting was awful. But, I do not know what problems they are having at the moment, I'm telling them what to do, but they are doing something else," said a dejected Trevor Chappell after the match.

"The bowling was quite good again. The finish was very good. I do not know what would be the conditions in Bulawayo. We will decide our next course of action once we reach there."

Bangladesh will leave Harare tomorrow morning for Bulawayo, which is only one-hour trip by air. (Scorecards and more stories on Page 13)

No scope for understanding: Khaleda

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appointment Election Commissioners in place of the two who are due to retire on April 14.

"The caretaker government should appoint the two new election commissioners. We will not accept any appointment during the tenure of the present government."

Replying to question she said the Opposition was compelled to give the government a March 30 deadline to resign as it shifted from its earlier commitment to quit power to facilitate holding of polls by June. Awami League did not quit power and started misleading people by making false announcements because it became scared of a crushing defeat in the next polls, she said.

The Opposition was left with no alternative to going for tougher programmes, she said. "Our movement is constitutional, democratic and peaceful", she said.

About Jatiya Party (JP) Chairman HIM Ershad's reported understanding with the government, Khaleda said BNP has formed alliance with parties, not with individuals. There is unity in the alliance and it will continue, she added.

At this stage, DR MA Matin, acting chairman of the JP faction led by Nazim Rahman Manzur, said, "Ershad signed the declaration of the four-party alliance on November 30, 1999 on behalf of JP. We still uphold the commitment and we, as the majority, are with the alliance."

Matin said, "JP and unity of the alliance will not be affected if Ershad along with some of his family members quit the party and the alliance. Majority of party leaders and activists across the country are with the alliance."

Asked whether BNP will accept Ershad if he wants to remain in the alliance after his release, Khaleda said, "Ershad is still in jail. We do not know what stance he will take after release from jail." She however said Ershad will have to clarify his position after his release.

Replying to another question about violence and killings during hartal, she said BNP does not believe in politics of terrorism and killing. The ruling AL is responsible for terrorist activities and killings both during hartal and at other times.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and party leaders Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Dr Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain and Moudud Ahmed; JP (Nazir) leader ABM Golam Mostafa, Jamaat leader Abdul Qader Mollah and IOJ leader Ahmed Abdul Qader were also present at the press conference.

Bill on return of vested property

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its owner would be duly compensated.

According to the bill, the government would publish a district-wise list of the vested property selected for returning to the deserving persons within 180 days from the day the proposed law comes into effect. Besides, public announcements would also be made through radio, television and other media asking the deserving persons to collect the list of vested property from the offices of the Deputy Commissioners.

An owner of vested property must submit his/her claim supported by documents to the tribunal in 90 days from the publication of the list, said the bill proposing that the tribunal must settle a claim in a maximum period of 180 days.

Back in 1965, the then Pakistan government through an ordinance declared "enemy property" all immovable assets of the Hindus who had been in India on September 6, 1965 or stayed in that country since that date till the withdrawal of state of emergency on February 16, 1969.

A good number of people of the minority community of then East Pakistan had crossed over the border in the wake of 1965 Indo-Pak war. This was a second exodus after the first one following the partition of India in 1947.

After independence of Bangladesh, the government enacted the Enemy Property Act in 1974 vesting the all enemy property on the government. With the passage of the vested property bill, the enemy property act now stands

abrogated, thereby resolving the long-standing problem.

The bill providing for establishment of Bangladesh Institute of Parliamentary Studies (BIPS) aims at strengthening parliamentary democracy in the country.

According to the bill, the proposed institute to be headed by the Speaker will be responsible for conducting research on parliamentary system, practice and management, and sharing information and experiences with parliaments in other countries to make the national parliament more dynamic and prosperous.

Other areas of research include: the process of making laws, sharing information and experiences with other parliaments on legislative businesses, parliamentary rules, regulations and conventions, and cooperation with similar organisations in other countries.

The institute will advise and assist the government and the opposition as well as MPs of both sides on the parliamentary systems, practices, rules and principles and related developments across the world. It will also help the parliamentarians to get primary ideas about the issues of parliaments of the countries they visit.

The BIPS will provide training for the officials and employees of the Parliament Secretariat, organise seminars, symposia, workshops and orientation courses at home and abroad to raise skills of the government under a parliamentary democracy. Courses on conducts of the lawmakers will also be held.

Speaker rules out JS ruling on JP majority

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Procedure are concerned."

However, the 18 JP (Ershad) members who joined yesterday's sitting expressed satisfaction over the Speaker's statement. At a press briefing at the JP Parliamentary Party office, they said the Speaker's statement was positive.

One of the lawmakers said they would continue to attend parliament sittings depending on the release of their leader H M Ershad, detained since November 20 last year.

The JP members led by its acting chairman Rowshan Ershad entered the House at 12.05 pm yesterday. After a few minutes, Rowshan drew the Chair's attention and reiterated the demand for a ruling on the issue of JP Parliamentary Party leader. She

said the party's existence depends on the issue. Ershad was made leader of the JP Parliamentary Party at a meeting of the JPPP in 1996, she said.

Later, on March 27 this year, most of the JP lawmakers supported Ershad as the party's Parliamentary Party leader, she said in the House.

The Speaker said no copy of the resolution of JPPP's 1996 meeting, which made Ershad leader of the JPPP, has been sent to him.

"I have vetted the matter thoroughly," he said. Neither the resolution of the March 27 meeting nor any of the JP lawmakers in their statements in the House referred to the issue of validity of Ershad's leadership of JPPP as per provisions of the Constitution and the Rules of Procedure, he said.

After the Speaker's statement, T I M Fazi Rabbitt took the floor to say that the party lawmakers were not attending the session as per an understanding with the government, as being spread by certain quarters.

"We are attending the session to protect our election symbol 'pugh', since election symbol is of paramount importance for a political party," he said.

Replying to a question at the press briefing, Rowshan Ershad said the Ershad-led faction of JP is very much with the BNP-led four party opposition alliance, but "not in the 72-hour hartal (beginning today)".

To another question she said there is no possibility to form an alliance with the ruling Awami League.

PVC caution

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ethylhexyl-phthalate or commonly known as DEHP is not chemically bound to the plastic in the intravenous (IV) bag or tubing. DEHP migrates into the solution it contains.

The review confirmed that the toxic chemicals in DEHP leaches, potentially causing damage to the heart, liver, ovaries, testes, lungs and kidneys, and interfering with sperm production. The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has labelled the chemical as a 'probable human carcinogen'.

The Daily Star had earlier published two reports on April 6 and June 26 in 1999 on the toxic effects of DEHP present in saline and blood bags manufactured in Bangladesh.

More than 20,80,000 IV and blood bags, supplied by the government, are used annually in the country to treat sick and injured patients in hospitals. Two local pharmaceutical companies also manufacture IV saline bags in the country. Their production capacity is at least four times as high as that of the government plants located in Mohakhali in the capital.

The Drug Administration (DA) here, when contacted, said that PVC used in manufacturing medical products is safe for use and the government plants will continue to manufacture PVC Intravenous Saline and blood bags containing DEHP.

In a letter to The Daily Star following the publication of a June 26, 1999 report captioned 'Warning goes unheeded', the Drug Administration declared that PVC saline and blood bags are not harmful.

The DA provided a support document of the European Council for Plasticiser and Intermediates which said 'during the last 20 years hundreds of studies have been conducted by independent researchers and reviews by numerous government agencies have provided no indication that the plasticiser DEHP is unsafe for use in PVC medical products even among persons who use the products most frequently'.

Makers of PVC intravenous products admit that DEHP in IV solutions can reach concentrations of five parts per million (PPM) more than 830 times higher than the amount of DEHP permitted in drinking water (6 parts per billion).

Ershad not freed

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petitions for Ershad's bail, submitted by his lawyers. However, as the bail order did not reach the First Additional District and Session Judge's Court during office hours, the production warrant could not be recalled, forcing Ershad to stay back in prison.

Meanwhile, the Ershad-led Jatiya Party yesterday joined the Jatiya Sangsad sessions yesterday. An affiliate of the BNP-led four-party opposition alliance, it announced yesterday that it would not participate in the opposition-sponsored 72-hour hartal programme beginning today.

Supporters of Ershad crowded the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) premises where Ershad is staying in a prison cell, and the court premises, too. Many JP leaders and activists came to the city from outside anticipating Ershad's release today.

However, in the evening as the supporters came to know that legal complications had shelved their leader's release, Ershad's brother GM Kader and Acting Secretary General of Jatiya Party ABM Shahjahan told the waiting crowd that Ershad would be freed today and urged the people to come to the BSMMUH premises at around 10 a.m.

Our Court Correspondent adds: Earlier, Advocate Sheikh Sirajul Islam had submitted two separate bail petitions for Ershad with the Metropolitan Sessions' Judge's Court, Dhaka on March 18 against the rejection order of March 13 by the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka.

The court then fixed yesterday for hearing on the petition.

Islam prayed for Ershad's bail on health grounds stating that the former president was shifted to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University Hospital (BSMMUH) on March 24 due to

chest pain and later on, he suffered eye disease.

Public Prosecutor Quamrul Islam opposed the petitions on the merit of the charges brought in the cases, but he did not oppose those on health ground.

After hearing both sides, the court granted bail to Ershad upon a bond of Tk 3 lakh.

In one case, it was alleged that while in office Ershad had permitted the Scimiter company to dig exploration wells in Haripur oil field by abusing power.

In the other, Ershad was charged with abuse of power in giving a directive for purchase of 50 per cent of bitumen emulsion for Roads and Highways Department from Zakir Industries.

New OCs

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charge as OC of Cantonment thana and DB Inspector Nazrul Islam as OC of Pallabithana.

OC of Badra thana Kamrul Islam and OC of Pallabithana Shahid Mondal were transferred to DB police while OC of Mohammadpur thana AKM Mohsinuzzaman Khan was transferred to Dhaka range.

Some more city thanas will have new OCs shortly, the sources said.

President

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important institution and said besides their traditional duties as magistrate and collector, they coordinate various development activities of the government and act as district representatives of the government.

He advised them to act in cooperation with other officials of the district administration.

Among others, Cabinet Secretary Quazi Shamsul Alam was present.

2 AL men killed

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the "operation".

Of the injured, AL activist Nurul Kabir died at Chittagong Medical College Hospital later. Others are being treated at the hospital.

AL leaders blamed activists of Jamaat-e-Islami backed Chhatra Shibir for the killings. Shibir denied the charge.

Police said the incident is sequel to previous rivalry between activists of AL and Jamaat-Shibir at Satkania.

Police said contingents yesterday raided suspected hideouts of the killers at Satkania but none could be arrested.

UNB adds: Police and witnesses said a band of armed Shibir men, numbering eight, came to the bazaar by a microbus at about 10:30 am and opened fire on them.

Bullets pierced Golam Hossain's chest and head.

Condition of two bullet-hit Chhatra League activists Golam Faruque and Mohammad Touhid alias Bachchu was said to be "critical".

After the incident, the Shibir activists were locked in a gunfight with local supporters of Awami League and its front organisations at about 11 am.

During the 20-minute fight, the two sides exchanged over 200 shots. Police brought the situation under control by firing teargas shells and rubber bullets.

At least 10 more people were injured, one of them bullet-hit, in the fighting and in the police action.

Two of the injured were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital. The rest one being treated at Satkania Health Complex.

Meanwhile, police arrested 8 suspects from the area in connection with the killings.

According to local people, activists of Chhatra League and Chhatra Shibir fought gunbattles at least 15 times in last year to establish supremacy in the area.

BSS adds: Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday condoned the death of Golam Hossain and Nurul Kabir.

In a statement, she condemned the killings and said Jamaat-Shibir and BNP were out to destabilise peace through explosion of bombs, firing and acts of terrorism. She urged the people to resist the anti-liberation forces and foil their evil designs through united resistance.

She asked the members of the law enforcing agencies to arrest those responsible for the incident forthwith.

The Prime Minister prayed for peace of the departed souls and expressed sympathy to the members of the bereaved families.

CEC: Voter list

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Some 77 vendors, 62 in Dhaka and 15 in different districts, were given the tasks of printing the new voter lists.

Stressing reinforced monitoring of the printing works, the CEC asked officials concerned to take 'immediate steps to complete the printing works where not completed.'

Role of the Deputy Commissioners concerned in supervising the printing works was stressed in the meeting.

Officials concerned were asked to collect the compact disks (CD) from the vendors who have already completed the voting-roll printing.

Bomb hurled at police vehicle

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police constables were admitted to the National Hospital and later transferred to Rajbargh Police Hospital in the city. The other victims Zakir and three others were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Witnesses said that activists of the Seven Star group loyal to Tokai Sagar carried out the bomb attack as the court refused Sagar's bail petition and granted the police a five-day remand for interrogation.

Detectives took Sagar to the CMM's court yesterday with a prayer for a ten-day remand following completion of a three-day remand.

A bail petition was filed with the CMM's court seeking cancellation of the remand stating that Sagar was sick. Later, the CMM Shailendra Kumar Adhikari went to the court hajat to personally find out about Sagar's health.

The magistrate rejected Sagar's

bail petition as he found him in good health and granted the police a five-day remand.

Amin Rasul Sagar alias Tokai Sagar was arrested with a pistol on his arrival at Zia International Airport from Dubai via Sylhet on March 3.

Sagar was shown arrested in the Humayun Kabir alias Murgi Milon murder case upon a prayer submitted by the DB police. Milon was gunned down by a gang of assailants on the premises of the District and Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka in September last year.

Tokai Sagar is the ringleader of the Seven Star group, an underground gang comprising city's top criminals.

Involved in various criminal activities including arms trade and drug smuggling through ZIA, Sagar has been absconding since the murder of Milon.

Sagar is the assistant general secretary of BNP's city committee.

Handicapped for life

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Armed men in Feni abducted Tipu on the night of January 25 and unleashed violent assaults on him, beating him mercilessly with iron rods, hockey sticks and baseball bats. Later, the goons abandoned him thinking that he was dead.

Tipu's only fault was that he reported on the criminal and inhuman activities of a locally powerful politician and his 500 or so armed cadres.

Tipu was the Feni correspondent of the United News of Bangladesh (UNB).

Tipu's arm and leg bones were reduced to fragments and muscles crushed.

Doctors at the Pangu Hospital in Dhaka have already asked the battered journalist to pack up and leave

because they said there was nothing else they could do for him in the country.

Medical experts said that Tipu stood a good chance of returning to normal life if he is treated abroad. According to an estimate done by the experts, the treatment might cost up to Tk 20 lakh.

But who will foot the bill? Despite assurances from different quarters, including the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Tipu is now passing uncertain days at the hospital.