

Row over tender dropping Situation tense as AL, BNP men chase each other in Khulna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Tension is running high at Batiaghata upazila as BNP and Awami League activists created a law and order situation over dropping of tenders invited for leasing a canal.

According to Awami League lawmaker Panchanan Biswas, AL activists could not drop tenders due to resistance from 'armed BNP cadres'. Yesterday (Monday) was the last day for dropping tenders, he said while leading a procession at noon in protest against what he termed 'BNP terrorism'.

The procession was brought out after BNP activists allegedly drove AL activists out of the UNO office

snatching their tender schedule. Later, activists of both the parties chased each other creating a panic in the area.

AL leaders alleged that a group of BNP leaders of Batiaghata are hindering smooth running of upazila administration, particularly regarding financial matters including tenders. None but BNP leaders and their hired goons can enter upazila parishad office to take part in tender bids and for development works.

BNP leaders refuted the allegations saying that 'AL cadres' always try to interfere in upazila administration as they did during the last five years.

Asked about this, the UNO said, "I have nothing to say and no comment at all."

The OC of Batiaghata thana said "As you sow, so you reap." He added "both AL and BNP are two sides of the same coin. What happened during the last five years will also happen in the next five years," he said without any hesitation.

BNP cadres attack tea stall in Natore: 10 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Natore

At least 10 people were injured, seven of them seriously, BNP cadres attacked a tea stall at Durgapurhat under Lalpur upazila last night.

The seriously injured were identified as Abdus Salam, 43, Moslem Uddin, 25, Alim Uddin, 25, Belal Hossain, 28, Siddikur Rahman, 27, Mahmudul Islam, 30, and Shaban Khan, 45. They were admitted to hospitals in Rajshahi, Ishwardi and Lalpur. The miscreants used lethal and sharp weapons during the attack.

About 20 BNP cadres led by ward BNP president and Duaria UP member Fazlur Rahman Fazal swooped on a tea stall at Durgapurhat where Moheswar School managing committee members were taking tea. They allegedly snatched Tk 40,000 from businessman Abul Salam who was rushed to RMCH in a critical condition.

The attack was a sequel to a dispute over forming the managing committee of the school headed by a BNP nominated person.

A case was filed with Lalpur thana in this connection accusing 20 people including Fazal.

Businessman dies

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fulfill the demand, Elin shot him in the belly. The employees took him to Samorita Hospital immediately. He was operated upon but the bullet could not be removed.

As his condition deteriorated, he was shifted to Bangladesh Medical College Hospital on November 27.

Ramzan was father of a three-year-old son and a one-year-old daughter. The Daily Star published a detailed report on the incident on December 1.

Asgar Ali had also told The Daily Star that Abdil Latif called Ramzan to his office earlier and asked him to pay one lakh taka at a time and Tk 20,000 per month if he wanted to do business in the area.

A case was lodged with Mohammadpur thana on November 19. When contacted yesterday, the duty officer said they could not yet make any progress in investigation into the incident.

US urged to invest

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have told the delegation that Bangladesh wants to assess its gas reserve before arriving at any decision.

The foreign minister later told The Daily Star that no fresh request for gas export was made during the meeting and that the delegation appreciated Dhaka's stand in this regard.

Knowledgeable circles viewed the meeting as very important as regards export of gas and promotion of US business in the country as the delegation included Boyd Montgomery, President of USBBC and Vice-president of International Energy Operation for Bangladesh, India and China and Calvin Humphrey, President and CEO of Humphrey International and a former senior energy official in the Clinton administration. The other members included Herbert J Davis, Executive Director of USBBC and Lee Gates, Manager, Halliburton Energy Development.

The delegation was accompanied by US Ambassador in Bangladesh Mary Ann Peters.

The foreign minister said he urged the delegation to come forward to play the role of match-makers for establishing sufficient backward linkage industries in the

textile sector through US investment.

He also said the government is making "adequate reforms" in various sectors, specially in the financial sector, to attract more foreign investment.

The Bangladesh foreign minister also called for removal of impediments in the legal framework for encouraging more US investment in Bangladesh.

Special security

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Branch (SB) continued their duty at her residence.

Mentioned, after competition of her tenure as prime minister on July 15 this year, Hasina continued to enjoy special security under the law enacted on June 20.

An aide to Sheikh Hasina told The Daily Star last night that members of the SSF and PGR started preparing from early afternoon for their withdrawal.

Metal detector placed in front of the main entrance of Sudha Sadan, temporary camps, sheds and bunkers set up by them were removed by evening, he added.

After iftar, members of the two forces had a brief farewell meeting with Hasina.

Hasina: Gas-based items

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free entry into the US market, according to a party press release issued after the meeting.

During talks with the delegation, Hasina expressed her surprise at the changed stance of BNP chief Khaleda Zia on the issue of gas export. While in the opposition, Khaleda had opposed gas export, Hasina recalled.

Council member Calvin Humphrey along with its other members discussed with Hasina prospects for development of Bangladesh's gas resources. Humphrey mentioned Hasina's role in developing US-Bangladesh relations, the press release said.

AL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil and Abul Hasan Chowdhury were also present during the discussion.

UNB adds: "Our position about gas is very much clear. We want to use this resource for development of our own people. Our first priority is to meet the demand of our people," she told the delegation.

Urging the US investors to make investment for determining the actual reserves of gas, she said, "Indeed, we don't know the actual reserve ... What I think is that a market for gas could be created in Bangladesh."



People queue at ticket counter at Kamalapur Railway Station in the city as the authorities started selling advance tickets yesterday on the occasion of Eid-ul-Fitr.

With victory in Afghanistan, US to focus on ' sleeper cells '

AFP, Washington

With victory in Afghanistan apparently within reach, Washington will increase its focus on rooting out domestic al-Qaeda terrorist " sleeper " cells, the Washington Post reported today, citing White House officials.

" There are al-Qaeda cells sitting out there some in the United States, some in friendly countries, some in countries with a long history " of harbouring terrorist groups, a senior White House official told the Post.

" This is the most dangerous fact for American security right now, " the official said, adding that international cooperation is essential in uprooting the small, self-contained terrorist units and " for the first time, we have a real, international intelligence network. "

US officials believe that some of the people involved in the September 11 terror attacks had been in the United States for years, living anonymously and waiting for the right moment to become active.

The US officials downplayed speculation that Iraq will be the next US target in its campaign against global terrorism, the Post wrote.

Nevertheless, Secretary of State Colin Powell warned Sunday that Iraq President Saddam Hussein should be " worried " about his growing international isolation.

" He is presiding over a despotic regime in a country that has been

broken by 10 years of sanctions and he is just about completely isolated within the world, " Powell told the CBS " Face the Nation " program.

A New York report says, the Soviet Red Army labored for 10 years to get a handle on the kind of fortified cave system that terror suspect Osama bin Laden is believed to be hiding out in inside Afghanistan.

But US experts say that the United States has more trump cards up its sleeve than the Soviets had in their time, as it tries to rout bin Laden and his al-Qaeda network from their system of tunnels and caves in a campaign on terror that has almost removed the Taliban militia from Afghanistan.

Unlike the Soviets, who operated during the 1980s in a hostile environment, the US military can count on grass-roots fighters and members of allied tribes in regions where al-Qaeda is most deeply entrenched in its hideaways, the experts say.

" The key for the US is to find a way to work together with local forces, " said Ali Jalali, an expert on Afghan military matters and a former army colonel and officer between 1979 and 1982, during the Afghan resistance against the former Soviet Union.

" The Northern Alliance guys are not trained for this, but they can help, " says Jalali, now the head of the Farsi service at Voice of America. " But they can be very

effective if they have the right people to coach them. "

Jalali, who wrote a military history of Afghanistan in three volumes, says of those hiding in the caves: " If you destroy the entrance of the cave, you bury them. "

" But those caves have many entrances and exits, " he said. " That's why you have to do a very detailed reconnaissance by the local people first. They know the area very well. You can't hide a secret exit from them. They're gonna make all the difference. "

US intelligence services have examined hundreds of potential bin Laden hideaways in Afghanistan and are especially interested in two sectors filled with caverns, tunnels and fortified subterranean bases used by the Mujahidin in the war against the Soviets.

If they manage to confirm that bin Laden and/or his men are holed up there, special US forces will not be in totally uncharted territory, says former admiral Stephen Baker, today an analyst with the Center for Defence Information, an independent think tank in Washington.

" We have intelligence people that were involved in the construction of the caves, people that have gone in, that are familiar with the infrastructure of those caves. Certainly we are studying that right now, looking for where the weak points are, " said Baker.



The Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal brought out a procession in the city yesterday, protesting government's move to export oil and gas.

Jatiya Sangsad roundup

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Chair, leading to a premature adjournment of the House.

Excepting for the first and the last day, the House hardly saw more than 100 MPs present despite the fact that the ruling coalition alone commands 216 lawmakers.

Moreover, a section of the opposition that attended the first session has another 22 lawmakers. Almost all the MPs attended the inaugural sitting while the number came down to around 130 on the day the maiden session was prorogued. On other working days, the number of legislators attending the proceedings was 75 on an average. The House saw a record fall in the number of lawmakers 25 the day before the session was over. Repeated appeals by the Chair failed to bring about any improvement in the situation.

Parliamentary rules provide that the Chair must adjourn the House only when a lack of quorum, presence of at least 60 members in the 300-strong parliament, is brought to his notice. For obvious reasons, the treasury bench members ignored the crisis, not to speak of a few opposition MPs who did the same.

Right from Leader of the House Prime Minister Khaleda Zia down to a backbencher, everyone was irregular in attending the House proceedings. On average, only 10 to 15 of the 60 ministers stayed in the House for most of the time while others registered their brief pres-

ence only to perform their scheduled duties. They came late and left early. Similar was the practice by most of the ordinary MPs including those in the opposition bench.

Because of the leading opposition party's absence, the House lacked lively or stormy debate across the bench. This, in fact, saved the speaker a lot of trouble in managing an opposition in true sense.

The speaker did, however, find it hard at times to manage a section of the treasury bench members who would often make uproar on being refused the floor or stopped from speaking beyond the rules or not given " enough time ".

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar also had a difficult time with some frontline ministers who sometimes differed with him on the legislative business. The treasury benches often played the devil's advocate apparently because of absence of their archrivals in the AL. The House witnessed verbal salvo involving the ministers and the ordinary legislators.

The ministers came under attack from the MPs on several occasions as the former did not attend proceedings concerning their ministries or failed to come up with satisfactory replies to issues raised by the lawmakers.

The occasional heat apart, the House also became lively whenever

a bill was passed or a statement castigating the boycotting opposition made. There were lighter moments in the midst of monotonous proceedings, though.

Beginning on October 28, the first session of the eighth parliament passed five bills including one seeking repeal of the law that provided life-long state security to and official residences for two daughters of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman - former prime minister Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana.

The House formed five parliamentary committees but failed to constitute its standing committees on the ministries. It also adopted a motion thanking former president Shahabuddin Ahmad for his address to parliament. The presidential address praising the coalition government and bitterly criticising the last AL regime triggered controversy in the political circle. Another resolution thanking the prime minister for her first address to the nation was also endorsed by the House.

And the final session that coincided with an AL-sponsored hartal against the move to scrap the security law for Hasina and Rehana was rounded up with the prime minister threatening the main opposition party with stern action for creating ' anarchy ' on the pretext of anti-government agitation.

' Water crisis is as bad as global warming '

AFP, Bonn

An international conference on the world's freshwater resources opened here yesterday to a call to place water scarcity on the same level as global warming, as a looming crisis in need of a swift response.

" The worldwide water shortage is one of the global problems, together with climate change, for which solutions are urgently needed, " German Environment Minister Juergen Trittin said in an opening speech.

The five-day conference gathers 1,200 policymakers and grass-roots delegates from 135 states.

It is one of several fora on top environment issues ahead of next September's " Rio Plus 10 " Earth Summit in Johannesburg.

As many as 1.2 billion of the world's six billion people have no access to safe and affordable drinking water, and nearly twice as many people have no proper sanitation.

Diseases from infected water supplies are widespread in many tropical countries. In Bangladesh,

millions of lives are at threat from shallow water wells that were drilled into rock tainted with arsenic.

Cross-border rows over access to river water are also a growing source of tension.

Fifty-one countries within 17 international river basins are at risk of water disputes over the next decade, according to water policy specialist Sandra Postel and Aaron Wolf, a professor of geography at Oregon State University.

Eight of these basins are in Africa, primarily in the south, while six are in Asia, mostly in the south-east, they wrote in the September-October issue of the US magazine Foreign Policy.

Hotspots include the Nile in Africa; the Jordan, the Tigris and Euphrates in the Middle East; the Ganges in southern Asia and the Mekong in Southeast Asia.

Internal stresses are developing in countries where a surging demographic rate and overlapped supplies have led to a water crunch.

In China, water shortages are especially severe in the Yellow, Huai and Hai river basins, which account for about a third of China's

cultivated land, population and GDP, but just 7.7 per cent of water resources.

China's water resources per capita amount to 2,200 cubic meters (77,000 cubic feet) - only a quarter of the world's average, according to official Chinese figures.

The Beijing government predicts that by 2030, with population increases, water resources per capita may fall to the alarming level of 1,700 cubic meters (59,500 cubic ft).

A statement being drafted by the conference calls for annual investment in water supplies of 180 billion dollars a year, more than twice present investment levels of 70-80 billion dollars.

Countries should gradually reduce irrigation subsidies to farmers and provide supplies to people on the basis of " affordability, " while rich countries should honour their pledge to provide 0.7 per cent of their annual gross domestic product (GDP) in official development aid.

AL rallies Dec 7

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Presidium Member Abdus Samad Azad in the chair.

The meeting also finalised party programmes for observance of Hussain Shaheed Suhrawardy's death anniversary on December 5, 'autocracy fall day' on December 6, 'Martyred Intellectuals' Day on December 14 and the Victory Day on December 16.

In a resolution, the ALCWC said the BNP-Jamaat alliance has to bear the responsibility for any attack on the lives of Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana following repeal of the Father of the Nation's Family Members Security Act, 2001.

It also urged people to wage a united movement against such revengeful and inhuman move by the ruling alliance.

The ALCWC said that by repealing the security act, the government pushed the country towards an inevitable conflict.

The meeting noted with deep concern that the killers of Bangabandhu were still at large and Sheikh Hasina faced several attempts on her life in the past.

In another resolution, AL condemned " police attacks " on its leaders and workers during Sunday's hartal.

The ALCWC also condemned attacks at the residences of party lawmakers Rahmat Ali and Tanjim Ahmed Sohail by BNP terrorists.

Insurance coverage

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Representatives from Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC), Marine Shipping Directorate, Launch Owners Association and FBCCI, and chief controller of the Directorate of Insurance will work to this end as committee members.

The committee will submit its report within a month, shipping ministry sources said. On the basis of recommendations made in the report, the government will enact a law requiring operators of passenger vessels to provide accident insurance.

About 2,500 people died in different accidents on the river since independence. At least five accidents occurred this year, including two involving passenger launches.

A total 177 people died as MV Rajangshaw went down in the river Meghna in January.

In the same month, nine people drowned in another launch mishap in Monpara.

Recently in late November, seven people died when ML Jahangir sank in the river Tetulia after being hit by another passenger vessel Cocco-2 in Barisal.

Saifur

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export of gas to India when it was in power but now that it is in the opposition was opposing the proposal. He said if Bangladesh did take a decision to export gas, it would be looking for remunerative price from prospective buyer.

Answering another question, Saifur said it was not correct to say that BNP government was unfriendly to India. " Had that been the case, the total volume of Indian exports to Bangladesh through both official and non-official channels would not have touched more than two and half billion dollar mark during BNP rule in the past. "

Earlier, Subodh Bhargava, former President of CII who presided over the interactive session, described Saifur Rahman as the architect of Bangladesh's economic reforms like Manmohan Singh in India.

He said the macro-economic status achieved by Bangladesh was a model for India. Bhargava suggested specific proposals for Indian investment in Bangladesh. In reply, Saifur invited Indian investment and welcomed Indian technology exhibition in Dhaka in January next.

The Bangladesh Finance Minister attacked the concept of neutral caretaker government in his country saying it is " totally repulsive to democratic norms. I can never accept the concept of caretaker government. "

Victory Day programmes

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render patriotic songs at a musical soiree on Tuesday, December 25. Mahbubuzzaman Babu will present a solo musical programme on Wednesday, December 26.

Sharmili Bandhopadhyay and her troupe will perform dances on Thursday, December 27 at 6 pm in the museum auditorium. Friday, December 28 will see a solo programme by singer Shama Rahman at 5-30 pm.

Child performers of Muktakantha will present a cultural programme on Saturday, December 29.

The curtain will fall on the seven-day extravaganza, which will be open to all, with a cultural programme by students of UCEP school on Sunday, December 30.

The museum remains open from 10-30am to 4pm during Ramadan. It will return to its usual timing of 10am to 6.30pm after the month of fasting.

The Muktiujuddho Jadughar has also taken up other programmes on occasion of Victory Day. The mobile car museum of the museum will visit Khulna as part of victory day celebrations.

The museum will also screen a documentary on George Harrison at its auditorium on December 5 at 3pm. Harrison organised ' Concert for Bangladesh ' in New York during the War of Liberation in 1971 to help the people of the war-ravaged country.

UZ polls

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upazila election was simply impossible under the circumstances.

They also emphasised the need for increasing the authority of the Election Commission to regulate election expenditures.

Adv Abdus Samad Azad, Saifuddin Ahmed Manik, Dilip Barua, Alim Biswas, Moshed Barua, BFM Mahbubul Haq, Mahmudur Rahman Babu and Fazlul Haq Ripon were on the 11-party delegation.

Election Commissioners Saifur Rahman, MM Munsef Ali and AK Muhammad Ali and Election Commission Secretariat Secretary M Saiful Islam were present at the meetings.

PM: IT sector

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She further said some 10,000 computers would be supplied to schools across the country in the next three years to encourage students to build up skills in Information Technology.

Khaleda told the delegation that IT Village would also be established to create IT professionals to reduce the country's unemployment problem as well as for its economic uplift.

She said her government attached importance to the IT sector according to her party's election commitment and included it in the government's 100-day programme.

The delegation, comprising IT business experts from Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and Sri Lanka, is here to attend BCS Software Expo 2001 to be held in Dhaka today.

Objective of the workshop, organised by the Bangladesh Computer Samity in collaboration with the ASOCIO, is to introduce the country's information technology to Asian IT and explore market for IT products in other Asian countries.

The IT business delegation informed the PM that they are now stressing the importance of exploring IT market in Asian countries following decline in business in the sector in European countries and USA after the September 11 terror attacks on America.

They expressed their admiration

for Bangladesh as it stepped into the Information Superhighway in the right direction, which changed their previous idea about Bangladesh only as a natural calamity-prone country.

After the tour, they would disseminate the message to other countries about the prospect of knowledge economy here.

The computer businessmen expressed their interest for providing joint-venture training in computer to Bangladeshi youth force.

Principal Secretary to PM Dr Kamal Siddiqui, Education Secretary Shahidul Alam and BCS president Abdullah H Kafi were present on the occasion.

BCL activists

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students.

Talking to journalists BCL general secretary AKM Azim said, " There is no environment in the dormitories for peaceful coexistence. "

He said " Non students and outsiders are still residing in the halls under the shelter of the ruling party backed Jatiyatntrik Chhatra Dal (JCD). "

The University Paribesh Parishad will hold a meeting today and discuss the issue, sources said.

AL protest rally

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and the government for obstructing holding of rally.

Police again moved towards the dais in an apparent bid to arrest her. Motia Chowdhury challenged the policemen and said, " If you have the courage you can arrest me. I want to see how powerful the BNP governments are. "

She said, " I was harassed and jailed during the tenure of previous BNP government and this time I want to see how the government arrests me from a rally protesting police attack on democratic movement. "

Police snatched both the microphones as Tofail Ahmed started addressing the rally after Motia. Both Tofail and Motia were seen shouting at police, " Why are you taking away our microphones? "

Amid the police cordon, Tofail addressed the rally for some time without microphone. He condemned the government for not allowing them to exercise democratic rights. He terminated the rally hurriedly.

Talking to journalists immediately after the police action, Tofail wanted " proper explanation " from the government why it prevented them from exercising their democratic rights. " The government is virtually pushing us towards calling hartal by preventing us from holding a protest rally and attacking and

arresting our leaders and workers. " He said during AL rule BNP was not barred from holding rallies and bringing out processions in front of its central office at Naya Pallan.

Police also prevented AL leaders and workers from bringing out a procession and marched toward the Zero Point, police lobbed three tear gas shells and to disperse them.

Pedestrians ran for shelter and shopkeepers downed their shutters but the procession continued. It terminated at the Osmani Udiyan.

Waqf estate

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