



PHOTO: PID

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia with the recipients of Ekushey Padak at Osmany Memorial Auditorium in the city yesterday.

BDR raids annoy some BNP leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of BNP leaders are unhappy over Thursday night's raids by Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in some areas of the city.

"The raids only resulted in harassment of our party men and innocent people," said a BNP leader.

Talking to The Daily Star, some other BNP leaders also expressed similar views. They however did not want to be identified.

The massive raids by BDR personnel for arresting listed criminals in the city failed to achieve their goals, the leaders felt.

In the raids, BDR arrested 291 people. Most of them were innocent while a good number were activists of BNP and its front organisations Juba Dal and Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD). JCD activists were arrested from Dhaka University halls while those of BNP and Jubo Dal from Arambagh and Eskaton areas.

After verification, police released the innocent ones but detained a number of them in jail for their alleged involvement in criminal activities. Some annoyed BNP leaders claimed that the detained are either activists of their party or its fronts.

Sources said that immediately after the raids, the annoyed leaders met the party's city unit president Sadek Hossain Khoka and strongly protested this. They also resented "BDR's excess" as regards the arrested, particularly 'innocent' students of the DU.

They said that such massive raids were launched when 'most the listed and identified criminals' went into hiding out of the city.

According to some sources, the home ministry had given BDR a list of criminals with their whereabouts. Only a few top ruling party leaders were informed about the raids. The State Minister of Home Affairs supervised the operation for arrest of notorious criminals, extortionists and muggers.

Many police personnel were also allegedly harassed by the BDR men.

To make the drive effective, mobile network was also snapped for hours. But the notorious criminals are yet to be nabbed.

In many cases, BDR men broke open the gates, dragged residents out of their houses and misbehaved with them, it was alleged.

From the DU halls, about 100

innocent students including two campus reporters were picked up. The arrested also included some criminals.

Instead of sending the arrested to the Police Control Room, BDR detained them at their Peelkhana Headquarters. They allegedly tied their hands and legs, blindfolded them and tortured them for more than 18 hours, which caused resentment among various sections.

"A democratic government should never go for such a brutal raid. Only a military government can do so to harass innocent citizens," said Tuhin, one of the victims. He was arrested from Mohsin Hall and 'tortured'.

According to him, the worst part of BDR atrocity was keeping their whereabouts secret. "None could trace us for more than 12 hours as BDR authorities kept our whereabouts secret," he said.

Aziz, another victim, said a BDR person hit him on the nose when he requested him to allow him to see. "They treated us as animals."

"During the 18 hours' confinement at BDR headquarters, they behaved with us as if we were the wanted notorious criminals. They did not even allow us to see while having food or going to toilet," regretted another victim, Abu Jafar of Zahurul Haq Hall.

A resident of Bangabandhu Hall said, "Drive to arrest criminals is nothing new, but the atrocity by BDR can never be acceptable to any one. 'Are not we living in a democratic society?'"

Tests confirm plague in 2 Indian states

PTI, New Delhi

Scientists at the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) yesterday confirmed that the disease that recently broke out in villages in Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal is plague, NICD sources said.

NICD sources told PTI that all three tests recommended by the World Health Organisation (WHO) that were carried out on the organism isolated from patients' samples were positive for 'Yersinia Pestis', the bacteria that causes plague.

They said the results have been communicated to the health authorities.

Road accidents kill 12

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In another accident, one unidentified man was killed and four others injured at Feni bypass on Dhaka-Chittagong highway at about 6 am.

The accident took place when a Chittagong-bound passenger bus from Naogaon fell into a roadside ditch as the driver lost control over the steering.

The injured persons were identified as Amol Sarkar, 27, of Chowddagram, Comilla, Amjad Hossain, 30, of Senbag, Noakhali, Mosharrif Hossain, 31, of Sitakunda, Chittagong and Alauddin, 20, of Manda, Naogaon.

Both the drivers fled the scene but police seized the vehicles. Two cases were registered with Feni sadar thana in connection with the accidents.

In Jhenidah, at least five people were killed in separate road accidents in the district on Monday.

Police and eyewitnesses said Habibur Rahman, 60, and his granddaughter Bithi, 7, were killed at Amtola under sadar upazila on Jhenidah-Kushtia road Monday morning.

The accident occurred when a speeding microbus dashed them from behind as they were crossing road, police said.

Another woman, aged about 40, was killed on the spot at Madhupur under the same upazila on Dhaka-Khulna highway on Monday morning when a Khulna-bound coach knocked her down.

Gas export

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ment soon, when the reports would be discussed in parliament. Besides, the opposition lawmakers are attending meetings of the parliamentary committees, he said.

"We have a two-thirds majority in parliament," he mentioned.

Asked about the proposal by Unocal for export of gas, the state minister said, "That's not our concern. We will take the opinions of the committees."

On this, he said, "In the past, opinions of local experts were not subscribed to in taking decisions on different issues of the energy sector."

He deflected the allegation that most of the committee members had taken a stand on gas export in different forums.

As per the energy policy of 1994, BAPEX is supposed to carry out drilling and exploration of at least four blocks. But unfortunately, it did not happen. Rather, BAPEX was made a partner in the PSCs, he said.

"We will look into the possibility of giving responsibility of gas exploration at the blocks for which the PSCs are yet to be signed," Mosharrarf said.

In the last five years, the use of gas in the country did not increase, no new fertiliser factory was established and no remarkable increase was seen in production of power.

Due to uncertainty over marketing of explored gas, some companies are not ready to drill, Mosharrarf Hossain said.

The demand for gas has increased in the eastern zone of the country.

"We need a huge amount of investment for development of infrastructure in the zone. Similarly, we need huge investment for supplying gas to the western part," he added.

Besides, the country needs at least two more fertiliser factories. "It is also not possible to provide gas to every household through pipeline, especially in villages for which the use of liquid petroleum gas (LPG) has to be increased," he continued.

He underscored building of a proper ground for investment in the energy sector in Bangladesh.

To curb corruption in the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation, it will be privatised soon, said the state minister, alleging corruption in the organisation.

He also said the process of formation of a regulatory body on gas, power and petroleum is underway.

FERB Chairman Badiul Alam and Executive Director Mollah Amzad Hossain also spoke at the programme.

Probe begins

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involved in irregularities. An inter-ministerial meeting then decided that a unified code of conduct for the NGOs should be formulated.

Meanwhile, following the government decision, the donor agencies have started thinking of new work-plans for providing financial assistance to the NGOs. The donors reviewed the latest development at a meeting last week, keeping in mind the upcoming aid group meeting in Paris.

"Donors will go by the government policy on allocation of funds so that the organisations do not face any hazard in obtaining funds," said a top NGO official.

ETV clarifies

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High Court Division on 18.02.2002 at the time of hearing of the ETV case.

"The news items unfortunately were wrongly reported so far as to prejudice the position of ETV in the case. As informed in the court by Mr Rafique-ul Huq the alleged conversation that took place between Mr Rafique-ul Huq and the Attorney General on 15th February, 2002 had absolutely nothing to do with the ETV case and neither did any of them ever mention the case during the entire course of their conversation."

"The subject of the conversation was an entirely different and completely unrelated Arbitration Case, which was heard on 14.02.2002 by the Arbitral Tribunal, headed by Mr Justice D M Ansaruddin along with Mr Justice M M Huq and Mr Justice M A Karim. It is all the more surprising then why this conversation was brought up in the ETV case as it would be completely irrelevant to the case and as such the manner in which the learned Attorney General submitted the said issue before the Hon'ble Court at the time of hearing of the ETV case may prejudice the interest of ETV in the case. Such behaviour of the learned Attorney General according to Mr Huq is



PHOTO: AL

Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina with the Language Movement veterans who were honoured by the party at a seminar on International Mother Language Day held at Mahanagar Natya Mancha in the city yesterday.

US-India talks today to finalise radar deal

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

In a major boost to military cooperation between India and the United States, the two countries will hold talks today to finalise the sale of American radars for locating weapons in India.

The deal will be discussed by a US team led by Maj Gen Bruce Scott, Commanding General of the US Army Security Assistance Command, in what would be first major government-to-government purchase military equipment from the United States.

Besides, a team of senior Indian Defence Ministry officials will visit Washington next month to discuss purchase of other weapon systems, including 40 engines for light combat aircraft and sensor equipment for checking infiltration from across the border in Jammu and Kashmir state.

India has expressed interest in acquisition of high-tech defence equipment from the US since Washington eased sanctions on military sales to Indian imposed

after New Delhi conducted nuclear tests in 1998. The issue of high-tech defence equipment procurement was raised by Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes during his visit to US last month.

That military cooperation between India and the US acquires significance in the global fight against terrorism was underlined by visiting Chairman of US Joint Chief of Staff Gen Richard B Myers after his talks with Indian leadership here yesterday.

Myers, who met External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra, Defence Secretary Yogendra Narain and the chiefs of three Defence Services, told reporters here Indo-US cooperation would have a stabilising influence in Asia.

Myers' visit was preceded by a meeting of Indo-US Executive Steering Group in Chennai (Madras) recently when the two countries drew up a three-year programme of holding joint exercises, combined operations and port visits. The focus of these activities will be anti-submarine warfare,

search operation as well as maritime surveillance and continuation of an exercise stopped since India's nuclear tests in 1998.

The first week of next month will also see the two countries resuming the meeting of Joint Technical Forum for research and production of weapon systems.

BTTB

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icked due to the inflated local call rate. In addition to per minute browsing fees, the Internet users will pay Tk 1.50 to BTTB to remain online for every five minutes, source mentioned.

Mobile phone users will incur similar expense while calling a BTTB number. For a six-minute peak-hour call to a BTTB number, a mobile user pays Tk 24 for airtime and Tk 1.70 as BTTB charge. From February 25, mobile user will pay Tk three and 15 per cent VAT for a six-minute call to a BTTB number.

Experts believe the tariff increase for local calls would have a negative impact on the information technology industry.

Chemicals in groundwater

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of the samples exceeded the World Health Organisation (WHO) guideline value of 0.5 milligram per Litre (mg/L) for manganese in drinking water. Wells in western Bangladesh (Rajshahi regions) were found to contain as high as 10 mg/L manganese.

The report also said five per cent of the samples exceeded the WHO guideline value of 0.5 mg/L for boron. Southern coastal areas and some small northeastern regions were found to have boron contamination.

Boron, if ingested in excess quantity for a long time, can damage the central nervous system.

A smaller number of samples mostly from the southwestern coastal regions exceeded the guideline value of 0.7 mg/L for barium.

Molybdenum was also found in high concentration, above the WHO guideline value, at Chapainawabganj and Faridpur. At two sites of the districts, the chemical was found at 410 and 800 micrograms per litre. This chemical has toxic effects.

The study also found high concentration of uranium, a carcinogenic element that may cause cancer. About half the samples from Chapainawabganj exceeded the WHO guideline value of 2 microgram per litre.

A special study at Chapainawabganj, Faridpur and Laxmipur revealed uranium presence in 28 per cent samples. The presence was 47 microgram per litre of water as against the WHO limit of 2 microgram per litre.

In Dhaka city, arsenic, antimony, boron, cadmium, chromium, molybdenum, nickel and uranium were detected in low concentrations.

Dr Kazi Matin Ahmed, one of the study consultants who is also an associate professor of the Department of Geology, Dhaka University, said, "The presence of the chemicals is quite alarming for us. But we must immediately initiate a monitoring system to determine the extent of the problem."

Alarmed by the revelation, Unicef office in Dhaka has requested the DPHE this week to include 'certain new parameters' for drinking water quality tests.

"We have urged the government to carry out more tests as we have evidence of new elements other than arsenic in drinking water. This is part of our precautionary measures," said Colin J Davis, chief of Water and Environmental Sanitation, Unicef.

Bangladesh has no set standard or protocol as to what to look for during drinking water quality tests. The DPHE tests some priority elements in water— pH factor, iron, chloride, manganese, hardness, electric conductivity and arsenic—important for health risk management.

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ment.

"We only test these seven elements, but it is time we include more elements in our drinking water quality checks. In fact, we are now preparing a water quality surveillance plan, which is in final stage," said S M Itishamul Huq, chief of the Research and Development Division of the DPHE.

Chief Engineer of the DPHE Abu Muslim expressed concern at the findings and said, "In response to the study report, we have decided to include more tests for water quality. But we don't have any device to measure uranium deposit in drinking water."

The government will have to spend additional Tk 1 crore this year for the new tests as some 12,000 tubewells will be installed in the rural areas. The arsenic test is the most expensive one, which costs around Tk 500 for each check. To detect manganese, boron, sulphur and iron, each test costs around Tk 50.

According to WHO, chromium at high concentration can damage liver and cause irritation in intestine.

Long-term exposure to cadmium causes high blood pressure, sterility among males and can damage kidney.

Other chemicals may also be risky if exposed for a long time.

25 awarded Ekushey Padak

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efforts to show respect to the martyrs are meaningless," she said.

Khaleda Zia sought suggestions and cooperation from the learned people to help make the path to advancement smooth.

"They can show us the way. The government's good intention and programmes are not enough in all cases," she told the distinguished personalities at the function.

Khaleda said Bangla is now the fifth-largest language in the world, and Bangla programmes are being broadcast on radio and televisions in many countries.

But one-third of the population of the country is still illiterate, and half live below the poverty line, she told the audience.

If this dismal scenario cannot be changed, "whatever way we observe, one day or one month a year, in the memory of language martyrs, I think, that would be mere formalities".

Each Padak consists of one gold medal, a cheque for Tk 40,000 and a certificate.

Twelve recipients of Ekushey Padak-2001 are: Abdul Matin — language movement, Prof Mohammad Rafiqul Islam — education, Shamoly Nasrin Chowdhury — Education, Mohadev Saha — literature, Prof Zia Haider — literature, Nirmalendu Goon — literature,

Golam Mostafa — film, Ataur Rahman — drama, Kabial Phoni Barua (posthumous) — music, Shah Abdul Karim — folk music and Binoy Bashi Joldash — instrumental music.

Fourteen recipients for 2002 are: Moulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhasani (posthumous) — language movement, Dr Mohammad Shahidullah (posthumous) — literature and language movement, Prof Dr Sofia Ahmed — cultural development and language movement, Kabial Ramesh Shill (posthumous) — mass song, Sirazur Rahman — journalism, Sadek Khan — language movement and film, Gazi Mazharul Anwar — music, Dr Manzur Hossain (posthumous) — language movement, Advocate Kazi Golam Mahbub — language movement, Prof Sharif Hossain — education, Prof Dr Abul Kalam Azad (posthumous) — education, Abdul Jabbar Khan (posthumous) — film, Ahmed Saha (posthumous) — literature and Prothiva Mutsuddi — education.

Prof. Dr Mohammad Shajahan who was nominated for Ekushey Padak-1996 was awarded posthumously. The then government in 1997 cancelled his nomination.

The prime minister unveiled the cover of two books and one CD on Ekushey February.

State Minister for Cultural Affairs Selima Rahman also spoke at the

function.

Cabinet Secretary Dr Akbar Ali Khan conducted the function and Dr Iftekharul Awal, director-general of Bangladesh National Museum, presented the keynote paper at the seminar.

Call money

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according to bankers.

The BB pumped about Tk 155 crore into the market yesterday and three banks took recourse to it. Earlier, on Monday the BB infused Tk 350 crore into the market and some nine banks availed themselves of the facility.

The call money market went on an overdrive after a BB directive making it mandatory for the commercial banks to maintain cash reserve ratio (CRR) with the central bank in local currency instead of foreign currency.

The banks have to deposit 20 per cent of their total deposits with the BB as statutory reserve ratio (SRR) of which four per cent have to be maintained in cash as the CRR and the rest in treasury bills or bonds. Earlier, the central bank allowed the banks to maintain their CRR with foreign currency to let them have more access to fund.

The BB move caused a flurry of activities in the call money market as the banks scrambled to borrow from each other and deposit the same with the BB. The call money rate ramped up to 51 per cent on Sunday.

'Gas reserve not enough for export'

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh has neither enough reserve to export gas nor the capacity to go for massive exploration to turn the reserve into resource.

With this observation, the national committee on alternative uses of gas at a meeting yesterday viewed that the expertise of International Oil Companies (IOCs) can be used in the massive exploration work.

But, at the same time, the committee felt that the IOCs would not come up for new drilling if gas is not exported.

Sources close to the meeting said the committee members pointed out that the IOCs would not be interested in massive exploration because the country will not have a market of the level needed for consuming the outcome of gigantic drilling.

Committee Chairman and former secretary Azimuddin Ahmed presided over the meeting held at Petro Centre in the city's Kawran Bazar.

The sources said the committee members observed that Bangladesh does not have the required reserve for gas export from Sylhet's Bibiana through pipeline.

They suggested that the government take steps so that UNOCAL

does not move to the international court seeking compensation, if gas is not exported from Bibiana through pipeline as it recommended.

Sources said the committee is likely to suggest buying entire interests of UNOCAL in Bibiana to avoid any suit. For this, the Petrobangla will have to pay 350 million dollars to UNOCAL.

However, the committee thinks the buy-out decision will have an adverse impact on direct foreign investment in energy sector. The IOCs who signed PSCs (Production Sharing Contracts) will also not go for any new exploration.

The meeting was learnt to have decided to suggest measures regarding investment for buying Bibiana gas field. It will also explain impact on foreign reserve for this decision.

Reviewing overall gas situation in the country, the committee focussed on the reality that the country will not have gas for a long time no matter whether the reserve is 11 or 16 TCF.

It saw very little prospect in export of value added items. It is, however, examining the possibility of electricity export but the matter is very complicated.

AL honours 38

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vance of the International Mother Language Day at Mahanagar Natya Mancha in the city yesterday, the opposition leader blamed the ruling coalition for "torturing" innocent people including her party activists and minorities, and denying their fundamental rights.

"Acts of killing, torture, extortion and lawlessness are going on unabated since the four-party alliance won the October 1 general election by rigging. The nation is now fed up with the BNP-Jamaat coalition rule," she said.

"They have established a reign of terror in the country, leaving thousands of people dead, tortured or denied of their constitutional right to live in peace. Women are being raped and innocent people murdered, but justice is denied to the victims. Bangladesh has turned into a hell of repression. Is it the Bangladesh we fought a bloody war for?"

"The defeated forces of 1971 are out to destroy all that the nation achieved through bloody struggles from the Language Movement in 1952 to the War of Independence in 1971," she said and blamed the ruling coalition for "large-scale extortion victimising businesspeople from streets to chambers".

Referring to food autarky attained during her rule, the immediate-past prime minister accused the rulers of conspiring to push the country back to its 'beggar status'. "They have come to power only to make fortune by plundering national wealth and exploiting the masses. But this cannot go unchallenged," Hasina said, promising to thwart "the misrule and injustice of all sorts".

AL organised the seminar on "International Mother Language Day: 50th anniversary of the Language Movement Day" as part of a series of programmes to observe the historic day.

At the seminar, the main opposition party honoured 38 people for their contribution to the Language Movement in 1952 and promoting the mother tongue. They include martyred language movement heroes Abdus Salam, Rafique Uddin, Abdul Jabbar, Abul Barqat and Shafaur Rahman. Twenty-two of them were given credentials posthumously.

Language movement veterans

Gaziul Haq, Abdul Matin, Abdul Gaffar Choudhury who composed the famous song Amar Bhayer Rokte Rangano Ekushey February/Aamiki Bhulitay Paari, singer Abdul Latif, journalist KG Mustafa, martyred singer Altaf Mahmud, former chief adviser of a caretaker government Justice Muhammad Habibur Rahman, martyred journalist Shahidullah Kaiser and writer MR Akhtar Mukul are among those honoured.

Sheikh Hasina was given credential for her role in making the Language Movement Day the International Mother Language Day. Some senior leaders of AL including Abdus Samad Azad, Zillur Rahman and Abdul Momen were also given credentials for their role in the language movement.

Others honoured include Prof Anisuzzaman, Gazi Golam Mahbub, Nadera Choudhury, ASHK Sadique and Rafiqul Islam.

Those honoured posthumously are: Late AL leader Shamsul Haq, Principal Abul Quasem, Dr Mohammad Shahidullah, Dharendra Nath Dutta, Mohammad Sultan, Mozaffar Ahmed Choudhury, Qamruddin Shoor, Ajit Kumar Guha, Hasan Hafizur Rahman, Abdul Hakim, Anwarul Haq Khan, Mohiuddin Ahmed, Subir Choudhury and Dr Golam Mowla.

Awarding the credentials, Sheikh Hasina said her party felt proud to honour the language movement heroes and those who contributed the protection of Bangla.

"But it is unfortunate that we are celebrating the great achievement of the Bangalee nation amid continued oppression by the government," she said. "Terrorism, hooliganism, corruption, nepotism, extortion, lawlessness and price spiral have made people's life miserable."

With ASHK Sadique MP in the chair, the seminar was also addressed by, among others, AL MPs Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Abdul Jalil and Mohammad Nasim; Palestine Ambassador Mohammad Shahta Zarab, Jorgen Lissner of UNDP, JV Ketelsen of European Union, Dr Anwar Ali Khan of UNESCO, Dr Rajib Humayun of Dhaka University and journalist Habibur Rahman Milon.

Action against officials

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declared illegal.

The order on the Government Servant Ordinance followed a writ filed by AKM Shameem Chowdhury, director of the Bangladesh Film Archive, challenging the disciplinary proceedings initiated against him under that ordinance.

On behalf of the petitioner, Barrister Amir-ul-Islam argued that the ordinance violated Article 133 of the constitution. The terms and conditions of service of the republic cannot be regulated by an ordinance, but by parliament or the president, he submitted.

The government recently accused Shameem Chowdhury of involvement with the Awami League's anti-BNP demonstration under the banner of Janatar Mancha in 1996. He was served with two show-cause notices by the government.

Shameem's lawyer termed these show cause notices vague and indefinite and without any substance justifying the allegations.

The BNP-led four-party coalition