

Holding fire

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Servant (Special Provisions) Ordinance, 1979 would not be declared beyond constitutional jurisdiction and as such void.

The petitioner termed the ordinance a black law, for it does have room for appeal against any disciplinary actions.

The court also asked the government to explain why the actions taken against the official, AKM Shamim Chowdhury of Film Archives Directorate, under the 1979 ordinance would not be declared void.

Besides, the departmental actions against these 185 officials have stirred up chaos in the administration as many of the officials openly challenged their department heads.

All these factors may have prompted the government to put on hold the move to sack officials alleged to have had links to the so-called Janatar Mancha.

Accordingly, the officials have been informed that the hearing would not take place as per schedule due to "unavoidable circumstances." They were earlier given

AL: Sudha Sadan

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when they came out of Sudha Sadan after exchanging Eid greetings with their leader.

The student leaders were detained without any specific charge against them, AL leaders alleged.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury told The Daily Star yesterday that during his telephonic conversation with the home minister, he expressed concern at 'extraordinary security surveillance' that at times reached the level of 'intimidation'.

"Besides, we are not always sure about the identity of plainclothes policemen. This situation holds potential threats for the opposition leader as anyone can use it as a cover."

As the road adjacent to Sudha Sadan leads to a public thoroughfare, indiscriminate checks caused disturbance to the public, AL leaders complained.

A visit by this correspondent yesterday afternoon to Dhanmondi road No. 5 where Sudha Sadan is located revealed that the presence of AL leaders and workers was thin. The surveillance also resulted in a significant drop in the number of visitors.

Although the daytime surveil-

Will culprits be punished ?

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get the 'culprits arrested and punished', he said talking to this correspondent on Monday.

"We do not do politics. We are not permanent supporters of any political party and it is not a political incident".

Mahima ended her life after the miscreants threatened her father to circulate her nude photos among locals. Her father had gone to local Jamaat-e-Islami leader Jahangir Hossain, maternal uncle of Selim, president of JCD unit at Lashkarpur Degree College, to hand over the nude photos. But he declined.

Police recovered at least seven photos and a negative of the rape scene from Jahangir's house.

"There are now two stories among local people regarding the motive behind the incident, and we have proof supporting both the stories", said a senior police official in Rajshahi while talking to The Daily Star.

The miscreants might have taken political revenge by raping the girl because Mahima's father and her brother are active supporters of Awami League, he said.

The other story is that Selim had

CU reopens Mar 2

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campus.

In accordance with the BCL demands, the authorities have already asked all resident students to vacate all the male halls by 9:00am today.

The university and hall authorities will start rehabilitating only the genuine students to their respective halls of residence from 9:00am on March 1. Provosts will check the students' resident ID cards before letting them in.

At the seven-hour meeting held at the vice-chancellor's (VC) office, the authorities also decided to tighten security on the campus. The proctorial body is going to sit with the police officials concerned today to discuss the security measures.

Vice-chancellor of the university Prof. AZM Nuruddin Chowdhury talking to The Daily Star yesterday sought cooperation of all concerned to put an end to the present deadlock.

"The university is like a family. If the teachers, students, officials and employees do their duty, it will create a congenial academic atmosphere on the campus," said the VC.

Proctor Prof. Abdul Hakim said to The Daily Star yesterday, "We now have only 150 policemen on the campus to maintain law and order but we need more of them."

"We told the SP (police superintendent) to deploy 100 more policemen to avoid any untoward incidents on the campus," he added.

At the meeting, the university

authorities also decided to take measures to ensure security of general and resident students on the campus, drive out illegal resident students and take lawful actions against the persons responsible for the attack on November 3 and other incidents of violence on the campus according to the probe reports.

Vice-chancellor of the university Prof. AZM Nuruddin Chowdhury, pro-VC Prof. Mohammad Shamsuddin, ex-pro-VCs Prof. Abu Yusuf and Prof. Anwarul Azim Arif, Proctor Prof. Abdul Hakim, Acting President of the CUTA (teachers' association) Benu Kumar Dey, and the president and the general secretary of the BCL were, among others, present at the meeting.

Meanwhile, the Islami Chhatra Shibir (ICS) has lashed out at the authorities for asking the students to vacate the halls by 9:00am today.

Allauddin Shikdar, president of the ICS CU unit, said the authorities were out to harass leaders and activists of the ICS.

"Many of our activists are scheduled to write their tests on March 1, 2 and 3," Shikdar said and added that this 'unfair' move will inconvenience their activists.

The Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD), student wing of the ruling BNP, however welcomed the decisions and said it will help the authorities to restore the image of the university.

Hasina to visit 6 northern dists March 2-5

UNB, Dhaka

Leader of the Opposition and Awami League President Sheikh Hasina will visit six northern districts on an organisational tour from March 2 to 5.

During the four-day visit, she will meet the family members of rape victim Mohima in Kathalbaria village under Puthia upazila in Rajshahi.

Mohima, a schoolgirl, committed suicide last week after being raped allegedly by three activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student wing of the ruling BNP.

On the first day (Saturday) of her tour, Hasina will address a public meeting at Sherpur in Bogra, visit Puthia and stay the night at Rajshahi Circuit House.

The Awami League chief will attend a meeting of party activities of Rajshahi district and city, and address a public meeting at Tanore upazila on Sunday.

On Monday, she will attend the party workers' meeting of Naogaon district and address two public meetings at Gobindaganj in Gaibandha and Pirganj in Rangpur district.

On Tuesday, she will attend the party workers' meeting of Rangpur district and attend a milad mahfil at Nimgachi in Raiganj upazila of Sirajganj district in the afternoon.

She is scheduled to return to the capital on March 5.

Emergency meeting of ALCWC today

UNB, Dhaka

An emergency meeting of the Central Working Committee of Bangladesh Awami League will be held today.

AL president and leader of the opposition Sheikh Hasina will chair the meeting to be held at 3 pm at party central office at Bangabandhu Avenue in the city.

Nurul Islam Murder: Another held in Laxmipur

BSS, Laxmipur

Laxmipur police yesterday arrested Anwar Hossain Mahbub, 28, an accused in the killing of BNP leader Advocate Nurul Islam.

A team of Laxmipur Sadar police led by Officer-in-Charge Kamrul Hassan arrested Mahbub, a nephew of district Awami League member in front of Pinky plaza.

Meanwhile, the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) brought out a procession in the town demanding capital punishment to the killers of advocate Nurul Islam.

Police so far have arrested ten persons including Awami League leader Abu Taher for their alleged involvement in the killing.

Natore clash

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AL offices at Lalpur bazar, leaving the upazila AL organising secretary Aftab Uddin Jhulfu and Jubo League leader Rana injured.

They ransacked the offices and damaged the portraits of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. In Bagatipara, three persons, including a woman, were injured when the cadres of the ruling BNP attacked houses of four AL leaders at Kolabaria on Monday.

They ransacked and looted valuables from the houses of Korban Ali Khondokar, Sher Ali Khondokar, Alal Ali Khondokar and Dulal Ali Khondokar.

Police were deployed at Borobaria and Kolabaria villages to avoid further clash.

A case was registered with Lalpur thana in this regard.

Arrest culprits

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February 19.

Convenor of the committee Justice KM Sobhan said the committee members visited Mohima's family and talked to their neighbors. Their investigating revealed that the rapists had a political motive behind the brutalities, Sobhan said.

It found seven reasons behind the incident. These are:

In August last year, local BNP office had sent a letter to Mahima's brother Jahangir, secretary of local Bangabandhu Club, threatening that the club would be demolished. After the October 1 general election, the club was raged to the ground.

Abdul Hannana and his family members were threatened with death after the election.

The gang-rape was done by Chhatra Dal activist Ujjal and his accomplices.

Hannan and his other family members are being threatened now to deny links with Awami League.

Local Jamaat leader Jahangir, also a college lecturer, joined the BNP-backed criminals.

The 25 member team of the Awami League backed committee that visited Kanthanbaria in Puthia thana on February 25 include Justice KM Sobhan, Barrister Amir-ul-Islam, Asaduzzaman Noor MP, Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, Ayesha Khanam, Prof Harun ar Rashid, Dewan Shafiu Aerifin Tutul, Shamim Akther and Hasna Arif.



PHOTO: AFP

Afghanistan's interim leader Hamid Karzai(R) shakes hands with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee prior to a meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi yesterday.

Afghans need more int'l forces, says Karzai

AP, New Delhi

Afghans want more international security troops to spread out through their country as a guarantee of the world's commitment to help Afghanistan until it can care for itself, interim prime minister Hamid Karzai said yesterday.

"The forces will stay there as long as Afghans need them," Karzai said during a joint press conference with Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

He said Afghans "demand to have more of the international forces in Afghanistan, in more provinces." It's not for their physical

safety, he said, but the troops are wanted as a guarantee "of the international commitment ... to Afghanistan until it is able to take care of itself."

Vajpayee said that if Indian troops are needed to help secure Afghanistan, "we will consider it favourably."

Karzai said he had no problem with Indian troops coming, but explained that it is the United Nations, not his administration, that decide which country contributes to the security force.

The country is beginning to establish its own army and police, he said.

"As soon as Afghanistan is stable, and firm on our own feet, and the fight against terrorism is finished, we will ask the international security forces to leave," Karzai said.

He confirmed that Afghanistan's 87-year-old exiled king, Zahir Shah, who now lives outside Rome, would be arriving March 21 to celebrate the Afghan new year. He is coming "as an Afghan citizen, an elderly statesman," Karzai said.

BNP-backed men

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Mondol, 35, Asha Parera, 26, Eli Parera, 24, and Shilpi Parera, 13.

On Tuesday afternoon, BNP terrorists abducted two villagers -- Anil Gomez and Gagon Rojario -- both of the Christian Para under Kadamtali union.

They were assaulted mercilessly before the villagers rescued them on Tuesday night.

Mohammad Shajahan, the BNP union unit president, allegedly led the assailants, witnesses said.

The BNP terrorists have constantly threatened and tortured the Christians of the three villages since the October 1 election, calling them voters of the Awami League, said local people.

More than 25 thousand Christians reside in a number of villages under nine unions of the upazila.

The violent incidents of the last two days have sent a wave of panic among the Christians, some of whom have already fled to Pabna town.

In another incident on Sunday, at least 20 people, including a woman and two children, were injured when alleged BNP-backed terrorists attacked residences of Awami League activists in two unions under Sujaganar upazila.

More than 200 armed terrorists

led by a BNP leader, also former UP chairman, attacked the houses of the AL activists following an altercation on the Eid-day, said local people.

The terrorists also looted and damaged the houses in the villages under Khetupara and Manikhat unions.

Many have fled their homes and taken refuge in Pabna town, fearing further attacks.

It is alleged that Sujaganar police refused to file any case against the attackers.

Despite repeated attempts, the officer-in-charge of Sujaganar Police Station could not be reached for his comments.

Among the injured -- admitted to Pabna and Sujaganar hospitals -- are eight-year-old daughter and wife of AL activist Amzad.

Many could not celebrate the Eid-ul-Azha at their village homes only because they were AL activists.

A few days before the Eid, two AL activists came under attacks by BNP terrorists on their way home.

When contacted, SP of Pabna Amzad Hossain expressed his ignorance about such incidents. If such incidents have taken place, the victims should file cases with the police station, he suggested.

150 BCL leaders

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After the preliminary inquiry, another list will be prepared and a drive will be launched to arrest them, a police official on the campus said seeking anonymity.

"Strong supporters but not formally engaged with BCL are also in the list", he said.

At least 10 to 15 BCL leaders of each hall are in the list, sources said.

The list also includes BCL men who were allegedly involved in the gunfight at Nikhet in the city on December 14 in 2000 that left one person killed.

It includes the 35 BCL leaders accused in a case filed by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on August 17 last year for beating JCD men at different DU halls following the murder of Firoz Ahmed, a leader of Ziaur Rahman Hall unit of BCL.

When contacted, BCL President Bahadur Bepari said the government move is designed 'eliminate its rivals' when BCL is planning to intensify its movement against its 'misrule'.

He said the government has already filed 566 cases against 777 BCL men in ten districts after the political changeover and arrested 714 BCL supporters.

Police arrested 10 BCL leaders including eight central ones under Section 54 of the CrPC from in front of the residence of Awami League chief Sheikh Hasina on Monday night without showing any charges against them. Of them, two were later released on bail and the rest sent to Dhaka Central Jail.

News analysis

Behind BJP's polls debacle

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

While top leaders of India's ruling BJP are analyzing the reasons that led to the party's defeat in assembly polls in the key state of Uttar Pradesh, certain factors have come to the fore which saw its decline to the third position after Samajwadi Party (SP) and Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).

Since 1991, BJP had been the number one party in Uttar Pradesh and it reached peak by securing 36.9 percent of the votes in 1998 parliamentary elections in the state which sends the largest number of members (85) in the 545-strong Lok Sabha, lower house of Parliament.

Compared to the previous assembly election in the state in 1996 which had also produced a hung verdict but saw BJP emerging as the largest party, its vote share fell this time by 12.5 percent. The main beneficiaries of the swing against BJP have been Samajwadi Party, whose vote share went up from 22 in 1996 to 25 this time and BSP's from 20 to 23 percent.

This positive swing of votes in favour of SP and BSP saw them emerging as the top two parties with 143 and 99 seats respectively in 403-member Uttar Pradesh legislature, relegating BJP to third spot with 88 seats.

The most discernible factors for BJP's debacle are the anti-incumbency one and factionalism in the party. But there are more important reasons for the party's defeat.

For one, BJP was outsmarted by BSP and SP in its assessment of caste equations which play a key role in Uttar Pradesh elections. Both BSP and SP, known for popular bases among backward castes, had this time fielded a fair number of upper caste candidates to woo the upper caste electorate who were disenchanted with BJP as well Congress. The strategy of SP and BSP appear to have paid off, more handsomely in the case of BSP.

The most remarkable study of the electoral calculus in Uttar Pradesh was that of BSP leader Mayawati who takes most of the credit for steering the party to where it is today -- in the role of a king-maker in the state.

The BJP had planned to split backward caste votes when its outgoing government had provided for reservation of jobs for a new category called "most backward castes."

It boomeranged mainly because Mayawati put up 85 candidates belonging to most backward castes. She also saw to it that there is a split in upper caste votes by nominating an unprecedented number of peo-

ple belonging to Brahmin, Kayastha, Bania and Thakur. In fact, BSP had given election tickets to 73 upper caste candidates. The BSP also put up several Muslims candidates who cut into the SP vote bank, analysts say.

More than one fifth of BSP candidates who won are from upper castes and a dozen Muslims, a clear pointer to the party's expanded social base.

The BJP's chances were also marred by the presence of a number of smaller state-based parties, including that of its former Chief Minister Kalyan Singh's outfit.

Singh's party got just four seats but played the spoiled sport in a number of constituencies.

Some analysts say that BJP's main election planks of the fight against terrorism and national security do not appear to have cut much ice with the voters who wanted better governance and economic management.

The election results in Uttar Pradesh has not given much hope for the revival of Sonia Gandhi-led Congress in the state. The party has improved by one percent its share of votes -- from eight in 1996 to nine this time. But in terms of seats, its share went down from 33 in 1996 to 26 this time.

City corpn polls

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city corporation elections, the BNP-led ruling coalition and the main opposition Awami League are learnt to have taken opposite stances as regards the local polls.

Elections to the local government bodies are held on a non-partisan basis. But traditionally the major political parties field their unofficial candidates, generating much enthusiasm in the political arena.

The ruling BNP wants the city polls to be held at the earliest while the Awami League is opposing any elections under incumbent CEC MA Syed. The AL has accused him of being biased after losing the last general election in October last.

"We will not contest any election under MA Syed who proved his bias towards the BNP-led alliance in the last general election," AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman was quoted by the daily Bhorer Kagoj on Monday. He told the daily that his party sticks to its demand for the CEC's resignation.

The AL boycotted the recent parliamentary by-elections alleging that the country's political atmosphere was not conducive for holding fair polls.

Meantime, the BNP aspirants for the mayoral posts in the three cities have become active and are lobbying for the party's backing. Fisheries and Livestock Minister Sadek Hossain Khoka, who heads the BNP's Dhaka city unit, has already launched his election campaign.

Khoka, whose candidature was announced by the BNP chief about two years ago, has already printed colourful posters and drawn graffiti on walls seeking votes.

Business tycoon Abdul Awal Mintoo, who joined the BNP before the last general election, is also aspiring to get the ruling party ticket

for the mayoral election in Dhaka. Besides, Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas, who was formerly a mayor of Dhaka, also figures in political discussions as another prospective mayoral candidate in the capital. Posters and graffiti seeking supports for Abbas are also seen in some areas of the city.

Nevertheless, the BNP high command is yet to publicly announce the Dhaka mayoral candidate.

The ruling party is facing a similar crisis in selecting mayoral candidates in two other cities-- Khulna and Rajshahi. But party insiders hope that such problems would be settled shortly after the election schedules are announced.

Overseas

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Minister Islam however claimed that manpower export to Qatar never stopped altogether. "But we shall try to increase the flow further during the upcoming visit," he said.

Around 20,000 Bangladeshis used to go to Qatar every year but now only a few hundred people go there and that too for government jobs, said a recruiting agent.

On the other hand however, recruiting agents hope overseas employment to Saudi Arabia would increase as the kingdom stopped recruiting Indian nationals since the beginning of this month.

Around one lakh Bangladeshis go to work in Saudi Arabia every year.

The number of Bangladesh citizens employed overseas since 1976 stands at around 32.93 lakh and the corresponding remittance earnings amount to Tk 83762 crore.

Four Mahima rapists

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(IO) of the cases said Mahima committed suicide by taking poison after being gang-raped, sources said.

The OC of Puthia thana told this correspondent that the investigation was going on well. "We are now trying to nab the three absconding persons accused in the rape case. We expect to get important information by interrogating the four remanded accused," he said.

There is no pressure from any quarter, he said.

Awami League leader and former state minister Abdul Quddus yesterday visited the parents of Mahima and expressed sympathy with them. He also demanded arrest and punishment of the culprits.

Schoolgirl Mahima, 15, daughter of Abdul Hannan of Kanthalbaria village in Puthia upazila in Rajshahi was abducted and gang-raped by four youths identified as activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) in the afternoon of February 15. The rapists also took photographs of rape scenes.

Mahima committed suicide on February 19.

Abdul Hannan filed a case of gang-rape accusing Ujjal, Selim, Ferroque and Ferid and another case against their fathers Musharraf, Khalil, Mutaleb and Sekander for instigating Mahima to commit suicide.

Police arrested Ujjal and the four fathers the same night. Selim's maternal uncle Jahangir, a local leader of Jamaat-e-Islami was arrested on the night of February 21.

‘Polythick’ in

FROM PAGE 1
flooded the city markets again despite a ban.

Production, marketing and use of polythene shopping bags in the city was banned on January 1 but manufacturers started producing those again, taking advantage of loopholes in law, the sources said.

The ban was overwhelmingly supported by people, and government organisations and businessmen started producing alternatives to polybags.

Sources said the cabinet banned production, marketing and use of shopping polybags up to 20 micron. But the specification was not mentioned in the government order. Publicly, it was stated that polythene shopping bags have been banned.

But the secrecy about the specification (up to 20 micron) was leaked by some officials and the manufac-

turers started production and marketing of 20-plus micron shopping bags, which are slightly thicker than those commonly used earlier.

Such bags costing Tk one to two each have flooded the city markets again.

Sources in law enforcing agencies said it is difficult for them to seize the new polybags because they have no mechanism to determine their specification. Policymakers are responsible for reappearance of polybags in the city markers, they said talking to this correspondent.

Meanwhile, sources said, the manufacturers have started lobbying with a section of leaders of the ruling party and officials to put the proposed amendments on hold so that they can continue with their highly profitable business at the cost of environment.

Train torched

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One police official in the Gujarat state capital, Ahmedabad, said the Hindu activists on the train had been chanting slogans in support of the Ayodhya temple construction campaign.

Several sources said the attackers were Muslims, but officials, including the prime minister, refused to confirm their identity.

The 1992 destruction of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya triggered some of post-independence India's worst Hindu-Muslim riots in which about 2,000 people were killed.

"It is a very unfortunate and tragic incident," Vajpayee said, calling on the radical group spearheading the Ayodhya temple drive -- the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP or World Hindu Council) -- to stand down.

"I appeal to the VHP to stop their campaign and cooperate with the government in establishing peace and brotherhood in the country," he said.

The dispute over the Ayodhya site is now in the hands of the Indian courts, but the VHP has set a March 15 deadline to begin building the temple dedicated to the Hindu God Ram with or without legal sanction.

"We have made our stand clear on Ayodhya. Its agitation will not happen through aggression or violence. Only two ways are there, either through talks or leaving it to the courts," Vajpayee said.

"I appeal to the people not to get agitated or swayed," he added.

Home Minister LK Advani issued a sterner warning to the Hindu hardliners.

"If they persist in their present approach, the government would not hesitate to take action against

Phone lines

FROM PAGE 12
fibre optic cable, connecting the switch room and Intermediate Distribution Frame (IDF) to 19,000 subscribers.

During a visit to the Chowkbazaar telephone exchange this correspondent did not find any short of fire alarm system or fire extinguishers at the exchange. BTTL officials however claimed that there were some fire extinguishers at the exchange, which had been used up during the fire.