

AL activists

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yesterday protesting arrest of a party lawmaker.

She also read out parts of a written statement of her valedictory speech she was to deliver in the House, copies of which was given to reporters.

The opposition leader regretted that her party could not join the House in protest at the unabated government repression and arrests of the AL leaders and workers.

In her nearly one-hour briefing, Hasina came down hard on the nine-month old government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia. She accused it of making the parliament non-functional, indulging in wide-spread corruption, repressing the opposition and breaking down the law and order.

"Till this evening we were hopeful that our MP would be released and we'll join the session. Unfortunately, that did not happen," Hasina said referring to the refusal of bail of the AL lawmaker in Shariatpur, Shawqat Ali, and his subsequent arrest.

By refusing him bail, Hasina noted, it is not only the privileges of the MP in question that have been curtailed, but also those of the people who had elected him.

She blasted the government for not providing the ailing lawmaker with medicines and for transferring him to the Dhaka Central Jail from Shariatpur instead of admitting him in the hospital.

She noted that despite submission of 148 notices by the AL deputies in the budget session of the parliament, they were not allowed to discuss anything.

She questioned the neutrality of the acting Speaker. She was equally critical of the Leader of the House Khaleda Zia for skipping the prime minister's question-answer session and her frequent absence in the parliament.

She referred to the incidents of filing of general diaries by a state minister and a police officer after issuance of death threats to them and concluded that these only go to show how grave the law and order situation is.

The opposition leader also said although many corruption cases were filed against a number of ministers of the present government, these were eventually dropped.

She claimed that during the AL merit not a single corruption case was dropped under administrative directive.

Hasina quoted press reports in support of her allegations against the government. Quoting the Reporters sans Frontiers, she said during Khaleda's rule Bangladesh has topped the list of

countries to have repressed the media most.

Citing an 'instance' of ongoing corruption, she quoted a report of The Guardian of London which recently reported that a 25 million dollar contract was awarded to an accountancy firm, KPMG, and Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman headed the local branch of that firm in Bangladesh.

She also quoted a report of Transparency International, Bangladesh to say that in last one year Tk 11,000 crore was looted in the country.

The former prime minister also castigated the government for repeated transfers and suspensions of civil servants, which has out the administration in a limbo. She was also highly critical of the unceremonious exit of President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

As regards the recent shutdown of the Adamjee Jute Mills, the opposition leader wondered about the fate of 15 lakh tonne of jute that the mills used to use a year and of jute growers.

The AL president also gave a vivid description of successes that her government had attained during its five-year rule (1996-2001). Incidentally, yesterday was the first anniversary of her relinquishing the office of prime minister.

Before concluding, Hasina expressed the hope that the government would take the AL into confidence if it really wanted a stable democratic, socio-economic condition to prevail in the country.

Asked whether she would take up domestic issues with the international community during her 25-day trip to the UK and US, she said, "the world already knows about these developments in our country. The Guardian has already reported on the corruption."

Asked how her party plan to deal with the 'government repression', she said, "We'll fight it legally taking the people with us."

Hasina also expressed her concern at a reported move to reverting to the presidential system of democracy again. She noted that the BNP had not amended its constitution, which is still very much in conformity with the presidential system.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid, senior AL leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Suranjit Sengupta and Abdul Jalil, Political Secretary to Hasina Sabar Hossain Chowdhury, among others, were present at the press briefing.

JS session prorogued

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He, however, hoped that the parliament would be livelier with continued participation of the main opposition party in its sessions.

After an eighth-month-long boycott, the AL lawmakers joined the House sitting on June 24 and started abstention afresh over the arrest of Party lawmaker Shawqat Ali. He was arrested in a murder case on Saturday.

While participating in the House sittings, the AL raised various issues of public interest and debates took place on them. But this did not last long as the party lawmakers walked out on July 11 for 'not being allowed' to speak on the floor and finally decided to stay off.

The AL legislators took part only in five sittings of the budget session. They staged four walkouts.

During the 24 working days of the budget session that began on June 4, the House passed the budget for fiscal 2002-2003, the finance bill and four other bills. It also adopted an unprecedented motion of censure against Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina for her 'harsh' comment on the death of ruling BNP's founder late president Ziaur Rahman.

The House also witnessed withdrawal of four bills relating to raising the allowances of MPs, ministers, state ministers, deputy

ministers, the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker. Minutes before their introduction, the bills were dropped from the day's order as Sheikh Hasina protested them.

Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui, who is now Acting Speaker, presided over most of the sittings since Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar took over as acting president following AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury's exit from the presidency on June 21.

Leader of the House Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in her winding up speech termed the AL's boycott unfortunate and blamed the opposition party for staying out of the House on 'lame excuses.' She however hoped that it would join the next session.

Sheikh Hasina, instead of her concluding speech in the House, called a press conference at her parliament chamber and explained why her party took to abstention again.

She accused the Chair for 'being biased and not allowing' the opposition lawmakers to speak on issues like deterioration of law and order, political persecution, unceremonious exit of the president, closure of the Adamjee Jute Mills and price-hike of essentials. Her party joined the parliament to speak on these crucial issues, she added.

AJM golden handshake

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Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) denied the allegation.

The disbursement in the first phase will continue until July 29. In the second phase, more than Tk 165 crore in provident funds will be disbursed in the second week of August. Around Tk 290 crore will be disbursed among 19,093 officials and employees this month.

On Sunday, the management disbursed Tk 23.16 crore among 3,778 former officials, employees and workers who have gone on retirement over the last three years.

The workers said that earlier, the government had announced disbursing the total amount of the golden handshake money at a time. They said it would have been helpful, if gratuity, provident funds and other benefits had been given at a

time. The workers said that in the ordinance signed by Jute Secretary ATM Sarwar Kamal on June 30, it was stated that the workers would be given extra benefits.

They referred to the other state-owned enterprises like the Dainik Bangla-Times Trust and BADC, which were closed under golden handshake. Those employees got hundred per cent compensation against their basic payments.

But the AJM officials, employees and workers are getting benefits of 13 per cent 27 per cent of their gratuity on the basis of their service.

The AJM authorities have classified the workers into five categories on the basis of their service period, said sources in the jute ministry.

Watery grave

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hours of March 16, 2001.

Munir, a resident of the BADC Staff Quarters, drowned in the Tolarbagh pond, being chased by police. Witnesses said the policemen stopped him from swimming to the edge of the pond.

Mahbub Hasan Oli, 27, died, when he jumped into a pond to avoid police arrest on September 18, 2000 in the east Hazipara area.

His friends also plunged into the pond. All but Hasan swam to the edge of the pond. The following morning, fire brigade divers recovered the body.

Shah Moazzem Hossain Tuku, 22, son of Abu Taher of Mirbagh, drowned in a lake on April 22, 1999, as police chased him and his friends -- Masud, Kuddus and Palash.

On March 14, 1999, Mojibur Rahman Majja, a technician, drowned in a lake at Sabujbagh in the city, when he tried to escape in a boat police arrest. When the policemen caught and hit him with their rifles, he jumped into the water and disappeared. Later, police submitted the final report on the death of Mojibur.

Shams Uddin Jewel, 23, of Muggapara, drowned in the water of a culvert at South Kamapur, being chased by police.

Jewel and his friend Ripon were travelling in a rickshaw to the Bangladesh Bank on November 15, 1999. Ripon started running in fear of police on manhunt. Jewel followed him and fell into the culvert.

Flood on wane

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Sangu receded by eight cm at Dohazari and the Matamuhuri recorded a rise of 34 cm at Lama and 21 cm at Chiringa. The Feni fell further by another 11 cm at Ramargh.

Reports received here also said hundreds of people in Sirajganj and Pabna districts are still out in the open sky. Most of the people who moved from the affected areas adjacent to the Jamuna are now taking shelter on higher ground.

Our Rajbari correspondent said continuous downpour has paralysed life in the district. Many people were found moving from villages adjacent to the Padma to nearby townships for shelters.

Meanwhile, the water level in Maijdee, the district town of Noakhali, is gradually receding. A week ago, most of the areas in the district were inundated which halted the movement of traffic there.

Flood situation in Sathkira district also improved slightly as rain stopped but there are speculations of fresh rainfall soon.

Perks for NRBs

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earned overseas.

For declaring INRBs the Bangladeshis would be divided into a number of zones on the basis of their residence. For example, the NRBs living in Europe and America would fall in a separate zone than those who are living in the Middle Eastern countries and the Pacific region.

The average earning of the NRBs in Europe and North America is much higher than in Middle Eastern countries.

There are many Bangladeshi expatriates who can remit millions of dollars to home if they are allowed to invest in their motherland, the source commented.

The source, however, could not say how many NRBs would get the facilities. "We are checking the foreign currency account holders documents and records of sending remittance for making an assessment for the purpose," the official said.

According to sources in the Ministry of Finance, the remittance earning in the country marked a remarkable 38 per cent growth last year in contrast to the year before.

The country received a total of \$ 2.5 billion in remittance during the period, which was only \$1.81 billion dollars during the previous year.

PSC renewal

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Industry insiders said once the PSC is extended the government would have no say in any such sell-out plan.

Previously British company Cairn sold half of its stake to Shell Oil and US Company Occidental sold its stake to Unocal amidst top secrecy.

The UMC-Ocean Energy's venture in Bangladesh faced setback due to cash crunch. They attempted to drill an exploratory well in Kasalong, but failed due to lack of finance.

Just a month before the termination of the PSC last year, the UMC applied for extension of contract for another year and said it would complete drilling of an exploratory well in Patia. The original PSC was signed with UMC and later, Ocean Energy came as a partner in 1999.

In January 2000, the government extended the PSC although the companies failed to drill the exploratory well. But the extension was given with the understanding that they would drill the well this time.

The UMC began seismic survey in block 22 in late 1997 on an area of 1,100 kilometres. The survey detected some oil reserves in an area called Kasalong and the companies sought approval from Petrobangla to drill an exploration well there.

After over a year of unsolicited negotiations during the previous BNP regime, the UMC signed its PSC with Petrobangla during the tenure of the Awami League government in January 1997.

Pearl killer to be hanged

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Kameez tunics and skullcaps, remained impassive throughout.

"There was no reaction from any of them," chief prosecutor Raja Qureshi told Reuters. "They stood, listened and sat down."

"The decision is unjust," defence lawyer Mohsin Imam told Reuters. "We were not expecting it because we had demolished all the evidence and witnesses brought up by the prosecution during the trial," he said. "We will appeal against the decision in a superior court and we are confident that the superior court will set aside the decision."

Defence lawyer Imam said the families of the accused, who were in court, were shattered by the verdict. "They were not expecting the decision," he said. "They were very dejected, depressed."

Omar has had links to Muslim fundamentalist groups since dropping out of the London School of Economics in 1993 after a privileged upbringing that included being educated at a private school where he was described as a model pupil.

Inspired by atrocities against Muslims in the Balkans, Omar, 28, received training in Afghanistan and Pakistan and vowed to devote his life to the Islamic cause.

He was arrested in India in 1994 and charged with kidnapping four foreign tourists. He was released as part of a complicated swap in 1999, shortly before his trial, after hijackers seized an Indian airliner and forced it to Kandahar, Afghanistan.

Omar then surfaced in Pakistan, but kept a low profile until after the September 11 attacks on the United States. Angered by the U.S. retaliation against Afghanistan's Taliban in pursuit of Osama bin Laden and his al Qaeda network, he began plotting against Western targets, prosecutors said.

Pearl, the South Asia bureau chief for the Journal, walked into a

carefully laid trap. A month after his disappearance, a gory video was delivered to the U.S. consulate in Karachi. It showed Pearl being forced to say he was Jewish, before showing his throat being slit.

Police found a body in a shallow grave on the outskirts of Karachi in May, but have not yet confirmed whether the remains are those of Pearl.

The trial started on April 5 inside a jail in Karachi, but was moved to Hyderabad in early May because of security concerns.

Reporters were barred from proceedings, but were briefed by both prosecutors and defence lawyers at the end of each day's hearings.

Vacant posts

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Ministry and 9,453 under Communications Ministry, one official told UNB.

Besides, the annual reports on the activities of different ministries and divisions for 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 fiscal years were placed for appraisal by the cabinet.

The meeting was informed that there were some 8.38 lakh audit objections in the 2002-2001 fiscal year and of them only 2.46 lakh could be disposed of.

The Cabinet asked the ministries to evolve a new format of report filing replacing the old one so that reports could be made more objectively.

In the meeting, the Council of Ministers also approved on principle the draft of the Police Staff College Bill 2002.

Cabinet members, state ministers concerned, cabinet secretary, principal secretary to the PM Office and secretaries of ministries concerned were present.

Viqarunnisa closed for 3 days

FROM PAGE 1
Meanwhile, police barred the students from entering the school campus yesterday in the wake of Sunday's stand-off that began when the government said 'no' to the extension of Principal Hamida Ali's service. The extension proposal was made by the college's governing body but declined by the government.

Police on guard at different intersections close to the school also barred guardians to proceed towards the school campus.

They put up barbed wire barricades near the school compound and the intersections adjacent to the Press Institute Bangladesh (PIB), the Officers' Club on Bailey Road and in front of the Eastern Housing Apartment at about 8.00am.

The blockade that continued until 10.00am created severe traffic congestion in the areas. Outraged by police action, students and guardians reportedly vandalised several motorcars. However, police said they did not have any such complaint.

Agitation against the government continued for the second day yesterday. The students demonstrated on the road in front of the school since morning. They shouted slogans and carried placards and posters reading: "We shall overcome", "We want Hamida Ali", "Viqarunnisa will be destroyed without Hamida Ali", and "None can change our mother".

"We could not attend classes as police did not allow us to enter the school," alleged a student, questioning the police intervention.

Ten platoons of police, including two platoons of policemen, were deployed in the area, official sources said.

Meanwhile, a ten-member delegation of guardians went to the Prime Minister's Office yesterday to submit a memorandum to press

home their demand. Police stopped the delegation on the way, and an officer took the memorandum to the office.

Another memorandum with a similar request was submitted to the education minister.

Hamida Ali told reporters yesterday that she had heard about a letter that reached her office Saturday with an instruction to hand the charge over to the senior-most teacher.

However, she did not receive the letter, as it addressed her as 'former principal'.

Amid continued protest, the government on Sunday came up with a pack of charges, including financial irregularities, against the principal.

The five-year contract of Hamida Ali expired on July 9. But the management committee decided to extend her tenure for two years more on April 30 for her tireless contribution to the institution.

The decision was sent to Chairman of the Dhaka Education Board Prof. Mohammad Zunayed on July 8 for approval through Abdul Mannan MP, chairman of the school governing body. But the board chairman refused to approve the decision, he said.

The education ministry took the decision against Hamida as per the Article 26 of the Dhaka Education Board Regulations, 1979 relating to service rules of teachers of private educational institutions.

A government statement said Hamida Ali was not terminated but sent into retirement on expiry of her tenure.

The statement said that after reaching 60, Hamida had already enjoyed extension for three times and completed 65 years of age-limit on July 8 last. The Dhaka Board authorities, as per the relevant Article of the Regulation, had informed the chairman and board

members that her job could not be extended further.

Later, on July 13, to facilitate the administration of the institution, the chairman of the governing body and the former principal (Hamida Ali) were requested to hand the charge over to a senior teacher.

Despite request by the Dhaka Education Board, Hamida was illegally claiming to be the principal of the institution and blaming the government in many ways, the statement said.

Besides, there was an evil design to mislead the guardians and students through baseless criticism of the government in newspapers, the statement added.

The Viqarunnisa Noon School and College is an autonomous institution that started off as a preparatory school in 1952.

Gas station strike

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Petroleum Dealers, Tank Lorry Malik Sramik Oikya Sangram Parishad has called the strike. Their demands include increase in commission against sale of oil and putting an end to extortion by the traffic police.

According to a press release signed by the convener of the Parishad, Syed Sazzadul Karim Kabul, the strike would go ahead as the government is yet to meet the demands.

He said Bangladesh Petroleum Dealers, Distributors, Agents and Petrol Pump Owners Association (BAPEDAPS) had given a seven-day ultimatum to the government to ensure a congenial atmosphere for the pump owners.

He alleged that the government was not sincere in accepting their demands.

Various organisations associated with oil distribution and supply have also extended their support to the strike, the statement claimed.

New AL list

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government and the regime of the nine-month old administration of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Yesterday, speaking on conditions of anonymity, a source closely involved in preparing the list said, "concerned by the growing repression and insecurity our leaders and activists are facing, we prepared this fresh list of political killings to keep things on record".

Referring to an earlier list of 'political killings' submitted to the government by the AL, the source expressed deep resentment saying the government did not bother to communicate with the party on the matter nor did it take any actions in favour of the victims.

On March 12 this year the AL handed over its earlier list of 'political killings' to the Home Minister Ataf Hossain Chowdhury urging him to take measures for detailed investigations and to bring justice to these cases.

The previous list included case summaries of 208 'political killings' that took place in the country during the period between October 1, 2001 and March 9, 2002.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Political Secretary to the Opposition Leader and the AL President Sheikh

Car crash

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The accident occurred when the mother along with her daughter was returning to their residence in Mirpur area from the city college, sources said.

The driver of the other car (Dhaka Metro-Ga-12-24-36) fled immediately. Tejaon police seized both the cars.

The body of the dead was sent to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) morgue for autopsy.

A case was filed with the Tejaon Police station in this regard.

Four killed in city

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young man Ibrahim called him from his G/1-block, Mirpur residence yesterday morning.

Neither Swapon nor his family members could give reasons behind the killing of Russell. Sources, however, indicated that Kala Jahangir might have a hand in the killing since Russell had been involved in forming an armed gang to oppose Kala Jahangir.

The victim's mother Taziya Begum said that her son Russell and Sumon had their breakfast together at home before they left for a friend's house at Mirpur.

The duty officer of Mirpur Police Station said that the victim was a charge sheeted accused in two murder cases in 1998 and 2002. A General Diary was also filed against him with the Mirpur Police Station.

The victim was the youngest of four brothers. A case was filed with Mirpur Police Station. No arrest was made in connection with the murder till filing of this report last night.

A young man died from bullet wounds at the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) in the early hours of yesterday.

An armed gang shot Mohammad Sajal, 25, at the Shahjahanpur Railway Colony Sunday evening.

Son of Akram Hossain, Sajal, a hawker, was involved in crimes, sources said.

Sajal's mother said a gang of five led by Suruj and Monu called her son out of their residence and shot him in the chest and hips at 5:30pm. The body was sent to the hospital morgue for autopsy.

In another incident, Hazaribagh police recovered the body of Hafej Maulana Rafiqul Islam, 40, a madrasah teacher, from the Companyganj Ghat area yesterday morning.

Teacher of the Baitul Aman Madrasah at Kamrangirchar, Rafiqul was on the way to his village home in Chanpur, Gazipur, sources

Hasina sent the list along with a letter to the home minister on that occasion.

The letter by Saber said, "we consider that political killings and repression are roadblocks in establishing the rule of law and such incidents would push the democratic process to the brink of collapse".

Copies of the list were also forwarded to the home secretary and also to the inspector general of police (IGP).

Rupsha Bridge contractor still feel insecure

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Construction of Rupsha Bridge is not progressing in full swing with the contractors still feeling lack of proper security in the project area, despite assurance from the communication ministry that they would no more face any security problem.

Extortionists continue to threaten them for not paying toll, contractors alleged.

In such a situation, foreign consultants involved in the project are also growing doubtful if the work would be completed ahead of schedule, as thought earlier.

A high-powered team from the communications ministry recently visited the project site to see for itself the security situation and the progress of construction work. It submitted a report to the authorities concerned in this regard.

The report suggested stern action against extortionists obstructing work.

A meeting chaired by communication minister Nazmul Huda later assured the contractors of full security and asked them to continue their work without any fear.

Police sent the body to the DMCH for autopsy and filed an unnatural death case. The madrasah authorities received the body from the DMCH.

In yet another incident, railway police recovered the body of another teacher from the Banani Railway Station Sunday night.

Osman Gani, 55, teacher of the Jannat Academy High School at section No. 11 in Mirpur, was found dead with marks of injury on his body on the northern side of the railway station at 8.00pm.

The police sent the body to the DMCH for autopsy. A case was filed in this regard.

JCD factions clash over RU hostel room

RU CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A clash between two rival groups of Jatayitabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) took place on the Rajshahi University campus yesterday, centring capture of a room at Sher-e-Bangla Hall.

Police have been deployed on the campus to avert further violence.

Witnesses said that Uzzal group of JCD captured a room at the hall a few days ago. But an activist of Likhan group of JCD, who protested this, was beaten up and injured by the rivals.

Activists of Likhan group then went on the rampage and drove activists of Uzzal group out of the campus.

Proctor of the university Prof Nurul Absar rescued Nahid.

Meanwhile, leaders of some political parties met the vice chancellor and demanded immediate restoration of a congenial atmosphere on the campus.