

45 intellectuals for observance of August 15 at national level

UNB, Dhaka

A galaxy of eminent personalities and intellectuals has made a stand for unanimously commemorating the anniversary of death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at national level for his extraordinary success in achieving country's independence.

The group of 45 intellectuals, including teachers, poets and artists, on Thursday issued a joint statement demanding of the highest court of law to complete the judicial process "in executing the killers of the great national leader" who, they think, transcended himself beyond party bounds.

"He is not of a party, but of the nation as the protagonist in an epic struggle for freedom, he does not belong to Bangladesh alone, but also to the world. Pride in him is part of our national pride."

The signatories to the statement are Justice Kemaluddin Hossain, Sarder Fazul Karim, Binod Bihari Chowdhury, Fazle Hasan Abed, Obaidul Haq, Shamsur Rahman, Prof Khan Sarwar Murshid, Prof Salahuddin Ahmed, Prof Rehman Sobhan, Foyez Ahmed, Prof. Sirajul

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Five hurt, shops ransacked allegedly by BNP men in Feni

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

Five persons were injured and four shops ransacked in an attack allegedly by the ruling party men at Mizan Bazar in Chhagalnaiya upazila on Thursday night.

According to local people, a group of 15 BNP men led by Munna, Nayan and Tapan reached the bazar at about 10 pm and demanded illegal toll from shop owners Nurul Islam, Abul Hossain, Dr Aziz and Shipu.

As the shop owners refused to oblige, the ruling party men beat them up and ransacked their shops.

Shop owners held a protest rally and stage a sit-in in front of Chhagalnaiya Police station yesterday demanding immediate arrest of the attackers.

Passenger launch collides with oil tanker in Meghna: 10 injured

UNB, Barisal

Over 300 passengers of a launch escaped a major disaster when the water vessel carrying them collided with an oil tanker in the river Meghna near Chandpur

early yesterday. However, at least 10 people were injured in the accident.

Witnesses and river traffic sources said the launch, MV Suravi-4,

sailed for Barisal from Dhaka Thursday evening. It collided with the oil tanker

in midstream of the river at about 12:45am.

The launch was badly damaged in the collision.

"A man instead of the sareng was steering the launch at the time of accident," the passengers of the launch alleged.

But the launch employees claimed that all navigational lamps of the oil tanker remained put out when the accident occurred.

AL leaders visit Bappi's residence

UNB, Dhaka

Central leaders of Awami League led by its acting president Abdus Samad Azad yesterday visited the residence of schoolboy Robayet Ahmed Bappi who was kidnapped and killed by his cousin in ransom.

The Awami League leaders consoled the parents and family members of Bappi, a student of Armentitola High School. They prayed for salvation of the departed soul.

AL leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Mukul Bose and Kazi Mizanur Rahman were present, among others.

Safeguarding rights of migrant workers

9 Asian nations to meet in Colombo for a common platform

RAFIQ HASAN

Bangladesh and eight other major manpower-exporting countries will form an international forum and adopt a common strategy on manpower export to oil-rich middle and far eastern countries, sources said.

The forum, also involving India, Pakistan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand and China, will raise its voice against abuse of workers in the countries employing them and

demand that rights of the migrant workers be upheld. They would also try to reduce the 'migration cost' for the workers.

The forum is likely to be launched at the first conference of labour and overseas employment ministers of these countries -- all from Asia -- in Colombo in November this year. If for some pressing reasons, the conference takes place some time between January and March next year, the forum will be launched at that meet, the sources said.

"This is for the first time manpower exporting nations are going to have a common platform to negotiate with the receiving countries," one source noted.

No receiving countries would be invited to the first ministerial conference, but they may be allowed to attend it as observer in the follow-up meetings.

Before the ministerial meet, some preparatory meetings of high

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Flood in three northern districts Adverse impact due to improper plans alleged

NAZRUL ISLAM, back from northern districts

Government measures to combat natural calamities including floods and river erosion in some northern districts of the country have not been so effective and have adverse impact on many areas as those were not properly planned, local people say.

Most of the government steps came as emergency actions, not on long-term basis, causing a huge

wastage of public money, some top officials told this correspondent during his five-day visit to flood affected Kurigram, Bogra and Sirajganj districts. River erosion is a common problem in these areas.

Scores of people and government officials in the districts expressed the view that in many cases, the authorities concerned did not address the actual causes of floods and river erosion before taking steps in this regard.

Officials of the Water

Development Board (WDB) and local people mentioned some of the causes which, they felt, should get priority attention. They also suggested that the government should rethink about its disaster management policy to save over 12 lakh flood and erosion-hit people living on the banks of the Jamuna.

"River erosion is a bigger problem than flood. We can face flood through makeshift arrangements, but there is no mechanism to face river erosion that makes us either homeless or forces us to shift our homes," an elderly man said. Many others echoed his views.

In this connection, they suggested removal of silts from the riverbeds through massive dredging, proper river training schemes and rehabilitation programme for the affected people.

"We never saw dredging of the Jamuna to maintain its navigability," said one Mokshed Ali at Ramna Ghat in Chilmari Upazila of Kurigram. Over the years, hundreds of shoals have appeared on the river and its course has been changing continuously, causing loss of lives and property every year.

Upazila Nirbahi officer of Chilmari Atikur Rahman said at a meeting that a large area was eroded by the river in the last one month. Erosion becomes severe when floodwater starts receding, he mentioned.

Asked about a permanent solution of these problems in the district, Deputy Commissioner (DC) of Kurigram Mesbahul Alam regretted that the WDB, "takes decisions unilaterally and without consulting the affected people." The steps taken are "very much seasonal," he said.

Asked about the need for a long-term plan to fight the calamities, he said majority of the people in the district live either on the river bank or on 113 shoals and they need some sort of special steps.

Giving a background of river erosion in the area, he said the main Kurigram town disappeared in the river Dharia in 1954.

However, the WDB's Executive Engineer Jamaluddin referred to

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PHOTO: STAR

Students of the Nurjahan Begum High School in Kamrangirchar on the outskirts of the capital go to school by boat yesterday. Floodwater has swamped lowlands in and around the city.

Gas export to India Dhaka may lose out to competitors

UNB, Dhaka

With strenuous debates on Bangladesh's gas export still lingering on, international competitors are moving ahead with their projects to strike contracts with potential Indian customers.

Two competitors are advancing their projects -- the Dahej and Hazira liquefied natural gas (LNG) -receiving terminals on India's West Coast -- through critical planning, material procurement, construction, financing and marketing in phases.

Construction of the Dahej facility is moving ahead and the proponents for Hazira have started site work and material procurement.

These competitors are targeting the same customers on the Delhi market that would be potential buyers of natural gas transported

via pipeline from Bangladesh. According to well-placed industry sources, the competition is growing fast to seize Bangladesh's potential "first-mover" advantage.

Therefore, they said, unless Bangladesh government signals its support for regional gas sales within the next 90 days, those competitors will easily swoop in, take the prized customers and block any future opportunities for Bangladesh.

This 90-day window is driven by a qualification date set by the National Thermal Power Corporation (NTPC), India's highest volume of creditworthy gas user. NTPC has set an end-October deadline for requests for qualifications from potential gas suppliers for significant gas contracts.

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6 hurt as boat hit by dredger in Shitalakhya

BSS, N'ganj

Six people, including a woman, were injured when a boat overturned after a collision with a dredger in the Shitalakhya river near terminal ghat here last night.

Witnesses said a Hajiganj-bound dredger hit the boat while it was crossing the river with 12 people aboard at about 8 pm. Local boatmen rescued them.

The injured were identified as Juma Rani, 30, Dashrath, 40, Paritosh, 30, Ganesh, 20, Krishna, 15, and Showo, 4.

About 12 people came to Bandar Rishipara here from Lalbagh in Dhaka to see a bridge. On their way back to Dhaka, they boarded the boat to cross the Shitalakhya. The dredger fled the scene after hitting the boat.

ASM NURUNNABI

Dhaka City's expansion to the north and northeast continues unhindered as is evident from the pace of development in those areas. But the city didn't expand much to the south as the river Buriganga stood in the way.

Important places like Zinjira and Keraniganj on the other side of the river did not develop much due to absence of proper transportation facilities across the river. Prior to 1989, an estimated half a million people from around these areas would take the boat daily to get to the capital for business.

Inauguration of the Bangladesh China Friendship Bridge over the river Buriganga in February 1989 opened a new horizon in the country's communication infrastructure. The 847.32-metre long bridge was a long-felt necessity for the city's southward expansion and it also contributed to the opening of the Dhaka-Khulna highway through Mawa thus improving the road link

DOWN TO EARTH

Going south: A way out of the urban nightmare

with the southern part of the country.

The bridge has had a considerable impact on the development of the areas around the bridge, such as Sreenagar, Zinjira, Keraniganj, Nawabganj and Doha. But the full potential of the bridge for greater development of the areas is yet to be realised.

A second Buriganga bridge at Babubazar linking Zinjira has been constructed to reap greater benefits through better communication with the southern side of the Buriganga. This second bridge

offers further facilities for people living on the southern side of the river, mainly in Zinjira and Keraniganj.

The bridges will bring vast areas of land on the south under the urban jurisdiction as per Dhaka City Master Plan, which, in due course, should help relieve the intolerable congestion in the Dhaka metropolis that is bursting at the seams. Absence of proper housing schemes outside the city centre on the one hand and the burgeoning growth of multistoried apartment building on the other,

has heightened the city's population density with near-paralysing effect on utilities like gas, water and electricity.

Real estate developers are currently so busy pulling down low-rise buildings in the capital and constructing multistoried structures in their places that there isn't virtually anyone to take up development projects like satellite townships on the other side of the Buriganga despite immense scope for investment in that direction.

Investment might be profitable

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Missing schoolboy found dead at Comilla

UNB, Comilla

The body of a schoolboy was recovered from a pond in Shubpur area of the town Thursday.

Local people found the body of Rhidoy, 7, floating in the pond. Rhidoy, a class II student, was missing since Wednesday noon.

Locals suspect the miscreants kidnapped Rhidoy and then strangled him.

Ansar killed as goods train derails in Rajshahi

BSS, Rajshahi

An ansar was killed and a railway guard injured when a Rajshahi bound goods train derailed near Lalitnagar station under Godagari upazila Thursday night, officials said yesterday.

Train service on Rajshahi-Rahanpur-Amnura and Rajshahi-Chapainawabganj-Amnura routes remained suspended since the accident at 10 pm on Thursday.

Ansar, Mazibur Rahman, 40, hailed from Chatmohar upazila under Pabna. Guard Monjurul Islam, 45, is now undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Railway Hospital.

One killed, 40 hurt as AL, BNP clash in Kushtia

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

One person was killed and 40 others injured in a clash between the AL and BNP activists over capture of a beel (waterbody) at Alampur under sadar upazila yesterday.

According to villagers, the clash began at noon when a group of BNP workers led by one Bashir went to the beel to take control of it at about 7.30 am.

AL workers in the area resisted the BNP men, resulting in a violent clash between the two groups.

Both sides used lethal weapons during the clash, leaving one Saleha Khatoun, wife of Delwar Mandal, dead and 40 others injured.

Of the injured, eight were admitted to Kushtia Sadar Hospital in critical condition.

They are Habib, 34, Mannan, 31, Razdar, 33, Afzal, 30, Matlab, 32, Almas, 30, Ramesh, 26, and Fatema, 27.

A tense situation is prevailing in the area. Police have been deployed to avert further clash.

Gunfight over capture of launch ghat in Madaripur: 10 injured

UNB, Madaripur

In a bid to capture a launch ghat, two rival groups locked in a gunfight at Char Janajat launch ghat alleged that yesterday leaving 10 people wounded.

Nine of the injured were hit by bullets and five of them admitted to hospital, local sources said.

The fight ensued at about 9am and continued till 12 noon. Police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control dispersing the warring groups.

Shahadat Hossain Khan, lessee of Char Janajat launch ghat alleged that some people led by Shahnewaz Tota illegally captured the launch ghat.

Bush won't hesitate to act alone on Iraq

Pentagon's Defence Policy Board chief says

REUTERS, London

US President George W. Bush is prepared to mount a unilateral attack on Iraq if necessary, according to a senior Pentagon adviser, but expects support from British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

"I have no doubt he would act alone if necessary. But he will not be alone when the time comes," writes Richard Perle in an article in Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper published yesterday.

The opinion of the head of the Pentagon's Defence Policy Board concurs with that of British analysts, who believe Blair will side with the United States if it attacks Iraq.

"I suspect when push comes to shove he (Blair) will go with it," Toby Dodge, associate fellow at Britain's Royal Institute of International

Affairs think tank said on Thursday. Perle said last week's offer by Iraqi President Saddam Hussein to allow United Nations weapons inspectors to return to Iraq would not influence the decision to attack.

"Neither George W. Bush nor Mr Blair will be deflected by Saddam's diplomatic charm offensive," he wrote.

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AFP Adds: British ministers and government officials have strongly advised the United States against attacking Iraq, warning that such action would intensify conflicts in the region. The Independent newspaper reported yesterday, quoting senior defence and diplomatic sources.

The warning came as The Times reported that Tony Blair faced increasing pressure from his own Labour Party and trade unions not to back any US strike.

According to The Independent, British ministers and government officials have warned Washington that launching a war to topple Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein would "contaminate" crises in Afghanistan, Israel and Kashmir.

"These are issues the Americans appear not to have considered," one official was quoted as saying.

Officials added that the United States had countered British worries by maintaining that existing conflicts in the region can be "containerised" and that it would be

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Grenade attack on Pak Christian hospital kills 4

REUTERS, Taxila

Three Pakistani nurses and one attacker were killed yesterday in a grenade attack on a Christian missionary hospital in Pakistan as the nurses left chapel after a morning service, police said.

More than 20 other Pakistanis, mostly nurses, were wounded, a hospital official said.

Police said one attacker appeared to have blown himself up in the assault, which comes four days after six Pakistanis were shot dead in a gun attack on a Christian missionary school northeast of Islamabad.

"The nurses were coming out of the chapel when someone threw explosives," said Clement Bakshsi, an accounts officer at the hospital in the town of Taxila, some 20 km west of Islamabad. "Three of our nurses have expired."

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PHOTO: STAR

Students return to the BUET, as its residential halls reopened yesterday. The BUET was closed after the killing of Sabequ Nahar Sony, a student, in a shootout between two JCD armed groups on June 8.

25 killed in blast near Jalalabad

REUTERS, Islamabad

More than 25 people were killed and 80 others wounded near the Afghan city of Jalalabad yesterday in an explosion at an office of a non-governmental organisation, an Afghan news agency reported.

The Afghan Islamic Press (AIP) said the explosion happened at the offices of the Afghan Construction and Logistics Unit some 10 km west of the eastern city. It said the NGO was involved in road construction.

In a report from Jalalabad, it said more than 50 people were killed or wounded and more than 200 bodies had been retrieved.

It said the wounded were being taken to hospitals in Jalalabad.

AIP said the explosion could have been caused by the detonation of explosives stored at the unit for use in road construction.

Bid to hijack microbus in Feni: 5 held

UNB, Feni

Five youths were arrested from Parshuram upazila Wednesday while trying to hijack a microbus.

Police said the youths hired the microbus to go to Dhaka when it reached Phoolgazi with passengers from Zia International Airport.

On its way back to Dhaka, the youths forced the microbus driver to go to Parshuram, a frontier area.

The microbus driver, Abdur Rashid, complied with their order and reached Parshuram where he sought help from local people.

Locals caught the five youths -- Jahangir, 20, Shahidullah, 20, Shimul, 12, Delwar, 21, and Ripon, 22, -- and beat them mercilessly. Later, they handed the youths over to police.

Meanwhile, another group of youths hijacked an auto-rickshaw from Daganbhuiyan on the day.

Two youths hired the three-wheeler from a bazar in Noakhali district and arrived at Daganbhuiyan where they beat up the driver and took away the auto-rickshaw.