

Police club Mahila AL rally: 7 hurt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least seven activists of Awami League (AL)-backed Bangladesh Mahila League (BML) were injured as police swooped on its procession in the city yesterday.

The two severely injured, Sabina Akhter Tuhin, 28, and Jasmine Akhter, 30, were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) yesterday.

The remaining, Opu Ukil, Ferdous Kekha, Parvin Sultana, Shahnaz Akhter and Nilufar Yasmin were admitted in different clinics in the city.

Sabina is a BML central committee member while Jasmine Akhter is the general secretary of its Dhanmondi Thana unit.

BML claimed that 50 of its leaders and activists were injured during the incident.

Sources said, activists of the organisation brought out a procession protesting the serial bomb attacks at four cinema halls in Mymensingh and the government's 'indiscriminate and offending allegations' against AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

The procession was scheduled to march towards the Jatiya Press Club and hold a rally there.

But policemen put up barricades immediately after it started off from the High Court front gate at 3:30pm.

However, the procession managed to break through the barricades. Female police tried to put up barricades two more times, but failed to stop the agitators.

Later male police rushed to spot and charged baton on the agitators to disperse them.

Meanwhile, two female police were also injured and were admitted to police hospital.

The activists of the organisation later held a rally on the street in front of the foreign ministry.

Sanskritik jote refused space at Shaheed Minar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday obstructed Sammilita Sanskritik Jote (SSJ) from setting up a dais on the Central Shaheed Minar premises for its four-day 'Victory Day' programmes from today.

Explaining their action, a police official said, "The organisation (SSJ) has not obtained permission from the Dhaka University authorities for its programmes at the place".

However, SSJ leaders said they are determined to hold their programmes at the venue, scheduled to begin today.

"We will try again today to inaugurate our programme", said Hasan Anif, a leader of the organisation. "If law enforcers obstruct us, we will hold programmes on the adjacent street."

The SSJ has been holding Victory Day programmes on the Shaheed Minar premises since 1990. It announced schedules and venues of its programmes about a month ago and set up a temporary office at the Teachers and Students Centre (TSC) with permission from the DU authorities, Hasan mentioned.

The Vice Chancellor of Dhaka University could not be contacted last night for his comment in this regard.

The jote will also hold Victory Day programmes at the Fine Arts Institutes of the DU, TSC island, Dhanmondi Mukta Mancha and near the stadium a Mirpur.

It may be mentioned that in the last week of September this year, the government made it mandatory for any organisation willing to hold any programme at the Central Shaheed Minar to obtain prior permission from the Dhaka University authorities. The government decision was resented by various quarters.

Justice tangled in corruption

South Asian experts rue extremely overloaded, complex penal system

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sheer backlog of cases, loopholes and complexities in the procedural laws and case management system, corruption and malpractice delay and deny access to justice for many.

Besides, the court machinery is overloaded, slow and not readily accessible to all.

Chief Justice Mainur Reza Chowdhury made the observations at the launch yesterday of a three-day South Asian regional conference. The conference aims to recommend ways to improve the penal system.

The Second South Asia Regional Conference on 'Access to Justice and Penal Reform' observed that the penal system in the region is based on the colonial structures. There has been very little maintenance or development of prisons even though in all countries in the region imprisonment remains the main penalty of the courts.

The conference, being held at the Sonargaon Hotel in the city, is co-organised by Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) and Penal Reform International

(PRI).

It aims to draw together government agencies and civil society groups from five countries of the region to suggest reforms to the penal system and discuss appropriate solutions.

Delegates from India, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh are taking part. The Pakistani delegation could not come due to visa complications. The first such regional conference was held in the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu in 1999.

Speakers observed the prisons are dilapidated, overcrowded and unhygienic. Justice is extremely slow, overloaded and limited. A large number of the prisoners are held on remand awaiting trials, often for longer than the charge specified. The human rights are being violated and there is a very limited alternative sentencing to custody, they said.

It was pointed out that the living conditions in a prison are regarded as a crucial factor in determining a prisoner's sense of self-respect and human dignity.

The speakers felt that special attention is necessary

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



Professor Amartya Sen, Justice Habibur Rahman and Professor Rehman Sobhan at the inaugural session of a taskforce meeting on a Citizen's Social Charter for South Asia at the BRAC Centre Inn auditorium yesterday.

Autorickshaw metering trips on indifference

JULHAS RIPON

The deadline to install meters in auto-rickshaws ends in 17 days, but neither the importers nor the authorities are ready to implement the decision.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) officials fear that introduction of meters might be delayed till April next year due to 'lack of prompt initiatives' by the government.

There is also a lack of co-

ordination between the BRTA, the traffic department of the police and the communication ministry regarding introduction of meters, said the sources.

Besides, a group of owners and drivers of three-wheelers is actively lobbying to delay implementation of the decision so that they can make windfall by charging high fares.

Moreover, the major importers of the CNG-run three-wheelers are not much interested to import meters to meet the deadline.

Amit Bhattacharya, general manager of Uttara Motors Limited, a major importer of CNG-run three-wheelers, told The Daily Star that his company is yet to import any meters, but it would take 'steps very soon' after surveying the market.

Some small-time importers have already started importing meters and are trying to get the BRTA's approval. But their quantity is insufficient to meet the demand, said a top BRTA official.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

New Pak rulers prefer Benazir back home

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan's new government yesterday said it wants former prime minister Benazir Bhutto to return from self-imposed exile, hinting a deal could be struck over outstanding court cases against the popular figure.

Interior Minister Faisal Saleh Hayat, a veteran member of Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) who defied party policies to join the pro-military government, said there were still several obstacles lying in the influential leader's way.

"We still have a very deep-rooted association with the People's Party," Hayat told Reuters in an interview, referring to a 10-member group of parliamentarians which broke away from the mainstream PPP to hand

the pro-military party a thin majority.

"Obviously we would like Mrs Bhutto to be back in Pakistan, but there are two or three complications. The most important is the legal issue," he added.

"If the government and Mrs Bhutto arrive at a political arrangement, then obviously you can always go for an arrangement where things are streamlined," he said in an apparent reference to outstanding corruption-related court cases against Bhutto.

"Let the time come, the government is still in its infancy. We will come to these arrangements if and when required."

In the clearest indication yet that the new government could hold out an olive branch to Bhutto, he added: "I don't mean to comment that we have an arrangement, but we feel

that in this hour there is greater need for flexibility."

The daughter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, himself a former prime minister hanged in 1979 by a previous military ruler, Bhutto left Pakistan in 1999 and has lived in London and Dubai ever since.

She is a fierce critic of President Pervez Musharraf, the general who took over the country three years ago in a bloodless coup and who has just handed power to a civilian government.

He introduced constitutional amendments ahead of the October 10 election which barred Bhutto from returning to run for parliament and vowed to arrest her if she defied him.

The defection of 10 PPP "turncoats", including Hayat, raised

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Shykh Siraj quizzed again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shykh Seraj was once again summoned to the Detective Branch (DB) office yesterday and quizzed about the alleged connection of his office with the attempt to smuggle top criminal Abdul Rashid alias Kala Faruque out of the country as a member of a cultural team.

Faridur Reza Shagor, Managing Director of Impress Telefilm, was also summoned along with Shykh Seraj.

The detective sources said they were yet to get any new information from them regarding their connection with the incident.

However, during their five-hour stay at the DB office, Seraj and Shagor denied the allegation of their involvement with the attempt to smuggle Faruque out of the country.

The two said that they had not signed the approval list of the team, which was supposed to go on a trip to Sweden.

The DB team has said experts and computers would verify their signs on the list.

Sources said, Seraj, Director of Impress Telefilm Private Limited and the Head of News of Channel I, and Shagor were summoned at 2:00 pm to the DB office and released at 7:00 pm.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Israel army kills five Palestinians

REUTERS, Gaza

Israeli forces in the Gaza Strip shot dead five unarmed Palestinians they believed were planning to climb a border fence to get into Israel, an Israeli military source said yesterday.

"An army force identified several suspicious figures crawling toward the border fence near the Karni border crossing overnight," the source said. "This area is barred to Palestinian traffic and there were specific warnings that an infiltration attempt would be carried out in this area."

Palestinian sources speculated they might have been laborers trying to sneak into Israel to find work.

The Israeli military source said forces opened fire and found the bodies of five Palestinians in a search in the morning.

"They were found with ladders, apparently having planned to get over the border fence, but no weapons were found," the source added.

In Tel Aviv, an Israeli court quashed a bid by one of the leaders of the Palestinian uprising to win release from detention, ruling that Israel had the right to try him on charges of masterminding attacks on civilians.

Marwan Barghout was captured by Israeli troops in Ramallah

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Plans drawn to observe Martyred Intellectuals Day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government, different political parties, socio-cultural and student bodies and other organisations have chalked out elaborate programmes to observe the 32nd Martyred Intellectuals Day tomorrow in a befitting manner.

The day's programmes will begin with hoisting of black flag and the national flag at half-mast on public and private buildings in the morning.

Politicians, intellectuals, cultural activists, members of the martyred intellectuals' families, leaders of different professional organisations as well as thousands of other mourners will visit the Martyred Intellectuals Memorial at Mirpur and their graves to place wreaths and offer fateha, seeking divine blessings for eternal peace of the departed souls of the martyrs.

President Iajuddin Ahmed, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Leader of the Opposition in the parliament Sheikh Hasina will give separate messages on the significance of the day.

Newspapers will bring out special supplements highlighting the significance of the day.

Bangladesh

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3



Saber Hossain Chowdhury, Muntasir Mamun and Shafi Ahmed get down from a prison van to appear before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka yesterday.

Release of Shahriar, Muntasir demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Some eminent citizens of the country at a press conference yesterday demanded immediate release of Shahriar Kabir and Muntasir Mamun.

The human-rights activist and the columnist have been held incommunicado since December 8.

Police cannot arrest a person of repute at midnight without any warrant, the press conference was told.

It was organised at the Jatiya Press Club by the South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Communalism (SAPUFC), the Muktijuddho Smriti Sangrakhan Kendro (MSSK) and the Resisting Killers and Collaborators of Bangladesh Liberation War '71 (RKCLBW).

The arrest of Shahriar and Muntasir is politically motivated and has exposed the 'fascist nature' of the BNP-led four-party alliance, the speakers said.

The government could have filed a case, if there had been any specific allegation against them, and police could have arrested them if

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

Gujarat exit polls put BJP ahead

Officials claim 63 per cent turnout

AFP, New Delhi

Exit polls yesterday put India's ruling Hindu nationalists ahead in voting in the wealthy western state of Gujarat, where riots have claimed up to 2,000 lives this year, private TV networks announced.

Zee TV said the ruling Hindu nationalist BJP party was poised to control around 100 of the state legislature's 181 constituencies up for grabs.

Its closest rival, India's main opposition Congress party, was set to win in around 70 constituencies, an exit poll by the Talim Research Foundation quoted by Zee said.

Independent candidates and smaller parties were expected to pick up a total of 11 seats in Gujarat's 182-member state assembly, the network said.

Aaj Tak television network in a separate exit poll said the Hindu nationalists would pick up between 93 and 109 seats while the Congress party would mark a victory between 72 and 88 state constituencies.

The Talim-Zee poll, which covered over 9,000 voters in 31 constituencies, predicted that the BJP would get more than 57 per cent of the votes against 34 per cent for the Congress.

While predicting a 16-seat loss for the BJP, the poll also indicated a loss of an equal number of seats for Congress.

In riot-torn northern districts of Gujarat, the Hindu nationalists were predicted to be well ahead of the Congress with 54 of all votes cast compared to 37 per cent bagged by the Congress, India's oldest political entity, it said.

In central Gujarat, another hub of the riots, the BJP is likely to get 60 per cent of the votes, almost double of that of the Congress, which owes strong links to Mahatma Gandhi, who was born and lived part of his life in Gujarat.

None of the two pollsters offered any statistics on the turnout of voters from the Muslim community, which bore the brunt of the riots of Gujarat, one of the bloodiest since the 1947 of independent India.

The BJP, currently with 117 seats in the regional assembly, would need 121 seats to stake claims to power without seeking the legislative help of potential allies in Gujarat.

The regional chapter of the BJP headed by hawkish chief minister Narendra Modi is roundly blamed for the religious bloodbath in Gujarat, one of India's most prosperous states which accounts for the wealthiest sections of the Indian diaspora.

The election results are scheduled to be announced Sunday, but an official said 63 per cent of the 32.8 million registered voters cast their ballots in 25 districts.

Election to one constituency was postponed because of the death of a candidate in the runup to the balloting yesterday.

Indian exit polls in the past have often proved to be unreliable.

State-run Doordarshan television station, which has been previously credited with objective predictions, stayed away from conducting its own exit poll in a clear signal that the national BJP government did not appear to be meddling with the volatile electoral process of Gujarat.

CID questions actor Manna

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police yesterday interrogated film star Manna as part of investigation into the murder of actress and model Tania Mahbub Tinni.

Manna was quizzed for the whereabouts of Golam Faruk Ovi, a suspect in the murder case, additional Inspector General of Police - CID Ashraf Huda told The Daily Star last night.

"During the six hour interrogation we got some important clues from Manna which, we hope, would help make headway", Huda told.

Manna told the CID team that he was acquainted with both Tinni and Ovi very well but denied any kind of connection with the crime.

In the mean time, Police is yet to find any trace of former lawmaker

SEE PAGE 11 COL 2

Attack on Khaleda's motorcade Police press charges against 49

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Madaripur

Police have submitted charge sheets against 49 people for their alleged involvement in the then opposition leader's motorcade attack in Madaripur in June 2001.

A group of unruly people had blocked the Kazir Tek ferryghat in Madaripur district while the then opposition leader and current Prime Minister Khaleda Zia was on an organisational tour in the country's Southern part.

Officials of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID),

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

BACK WHERE HE BELONGS



State Minister for Expatriate Welfare and Overseas Employment Mohammad Kamrul Islam hands eight-year-old camel jockey Zakir to his parents in the city yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR