

Hasina defends

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tion not to enforce hartals and maintained that parliament should be the place to resolve all problems in a democracy.

The government and the opposition should open fresh dialogues to make parliament effective and thrash out all their differences, as well.

The AL is scheduled to enforce a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal on February 12 if its 15-point demand, including an end to violence and corruption, remain unmet until February 10.

Hasina elaborated on the 15-point charter of demands placed before the government by her party recently and said, "The demands we have placed are logical and timely."

"If the government fails to fulfill the demands before the ultimatum expires, we will be forced to launch democratic agitation to unseat the ruling coalition." The opposition chief added that people are frustrated with the present rulers, as their inability to govern the country has been proven beyond a shadow of doubt in their first two years in office.

"Being in the opposition, we cannot sit idle while a failed government runs the state affairs and a quick change is a must to free the countrymen from the bad rule."

On the government's failure to arrest law and order slide, Hasina

accused the prime minister's sons and people at the Hawa Bhaban, alternative power centre of the BNP, of harbouring top criminals like Kala Jahangir.

"You, the businesspeople, should better know who are protecting the criminals and how much you have to pay to Hawa Bhaban to start a new business," she added.

The opposition leader also explained her party's position on the issue of export of natural gas. "During the rule of Awami League, we were against the export of natural gas without ensuring adequate reserve for domestic use and for this some international gas companies and their local agents opposed us ahead of the 2001 general elections."

"Ironically, the agents who opposed the Awami League at that time were appointed by us," she said naming none.

Referring to her party's defeat in the last general elections, Hasina said, "Maybe... we had to pay for opposing gas export before the elections."

"Our policy is very clear, we don't want to export the country's resources depriving our next generation," she added.

Abdul Matlub Ahmad, Abul Kashem Ahmed, MA Rouf Chowdhury, Mir Nasir Hossain, Dewan Sultan Ahmed, MA Awal and Helal Uddin also spoke.

Jayanti murder

Police quiz Shampa Reza

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday interrogated TV artiste Shampa Reza, sister of Azam Reza, at Gulshan Police Station to ascertain the actual relation between Azam and Afsana Mimi.

One of the interrogators said Shampa denied any illicit relation between Azam and artiste Afsana Mimi, saying she only knew of a formal relation between her brother and Mimi.

During the nearly one-hour interrogation, police also asked her say what she knew about the disturbed conjugal life of Azam and Jayanti Munshi Reza, a school-teacher of Australian International School, who was found dead at her Gulshan house last Friday.

A high official of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said his officers interrogating Shampa Reza found her fully cooperative.

He also said they might interrogate Afsana Mimi at some time last night.

Afsana Mimi, at a press conference at the Bengal Art Gallery at Dhanmondi yesterday, announced that the 50th episode of Saretintola, a TV serial, was likely to be telecast on January 15.

She, however, did not say anything about the allegations raised against her at Jayanti's killing.

Police have been interrogating Azam, a Dhaka Bank executive, who has persistently been denying the accusation of killing his wife. He says Jayanti committed suicide.

Jayanti's mother Lucille Sadekin, in a case filed last Saturday, accused Azam of murdering her daughter.

20 DU students

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students with iron rods, knives, sticks and sharp weapons, leaving at least 20 injured.

Later, some 50 students went to the canteen, badly damaged it and two other stationery shops. The shop owners and canteen managers alleged that the students also snatched Tk one lakh from them.

The DMCH employees confined six students and assaulted them. DU Assistant Proctor Asif Nazrul rescued them later. At this time, police were deployed around the DMCH.

More than 70 DU students again went to the DMCH but police encircled them and charged batons to bring the situation under control. They also confined six students.

The students then staged a demonstration demanding release of the six students. Police freed them on request from DU Proctor AK Firoz Ahmed.

During the clashes, panic gripped the DMCH outdoor wing and patients ran for cover.

DMCH Director Brigadier General Nazmul Huda visited the hospital later and ordered locking the north-west entrance to the hospital.

Officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station Mahbubur Rahman denied that police clubbed students. "We confined six students for interrogation but later released them on assurance from the DU authorities that they would not disturb peace at the DMCH," he said.

Brig Gen Ismat Ahmed Chowdhury and Mohammad Alimushsan, joint secretaries of the ministry, also attended the signing ceremony at the defence ministry.

GMG flights

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Dhaka-Kathmandu and Chittagong-Kolkata routes.

But GMG did not get the coveted routes, as Biman Bangladesh Airlines occupies the flight frequency allotted in air services agreements with India and Nepal.

GMG would have to purchase jet aircraft to fly to international destinations, as turbo-propelled planes in their fleet are unfit for long-distance flights, sources said.

Beginning its operation on April 6, 1998, GMG now connects Dhaka to Chittagong, Sylhet, Jessore, Barisal and Cox's Bazar with 28 flights a day on average.

Dazzles

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late Dr. Lyman Spitzer, Jr. He was one of the 20th century's most influential scientists, and in the mid-1940s, he first proposed placing telescopes in space.

"NASA's newest Great Observatory is open for business, and it is beginning to take its place at the forefront of science," said NASA's Associate Administrator for Space Science, Dr. Ed Weiler. "Like Hubble, Compton and Chandra, the new Spitzer Space Telescope will soon be making major discoveries, and, as these first images show, should excite the public with views of the cosmos like we've never had before."

"The Spitzer Space Telescope is working extremely well. The scientists who are starting to use it deeply appreciate the ingenuity and dedication of the thousands of people devoted to development and operations of the mission," said Dr. Michael Werner, project scientist for the Spitzer Space Telescope at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif.

PM breaks ground

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Ministers, MPs, the elite including a large number of academics, diplomats and US Ambassador in Dhaka Harry K Thomas attended the function.

The prime minister in her speech called it an historic event not only for the women of Bangladesh but also for the women of Asia where about 60 per cent of the world's poor, most of whom are women, live.

"Most of these women lack proper education and also have inadequate access to higher education," she said.

The prime minister said: "I am happy that the government has been able to provide a home for the unique institution in Bangladesh".

Pointing out that knowledge has become the driving force behind socio-economic development, she said the generation and dissemination of knowledge must ensure that there is no discrimination based on gender.

Referring to the Bangladesh situation where women constitute nearly 50 per cent of the population, Khaleda said no nation can make progress with half of its population being treated as inferior to the other half.

The prime minister said the government is making sustained efforts to address the problems of gender inequities and to bring women in the mainstream of national life.

She mentioned her government's programmes like free education for girls up to higher secondary level and monthly stipend. She also acknowledged the assistance and cooperation from the development partners in this regard.

"Young girls in rural areas no longer suffer from the feeling of being neglected by their families

and look forward to a future full of possibilities and promises and to a life of dignity and self-esteem," she told her audience.

She expressed the hope that the Asian University for Women would be truly international in scope, promote cross-cultural understanding, with respect for and nurturing of cultural diversities of the students of different religions, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

She hoped that the institution would soon emerge as a centre of excellence.

AL lawmaker

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Agrabad in the port city of Chittagong.

The charge-framing dragged on, as the lawmaker obtained a High Court stay order in his favour while the prosecution appealed against it, prompting the tribunal to shift the date several times.

The tribunal scheduled the next hearing on the charges for January 20 and will hear 48 witnesses during the trial.

The tribunal responding to a petition allowed bail to Fazole Karim under the MP Privileges Act until January 28.

Fifteen of the accused including the lawmaker were present in court yesterday.

The main accused, Azimuddin Mahmud and his mother Elahi Zan, blamed for masterminding the murder in a bid to grab land of Srikanta's family, have been evading arrest since the incident.

Srikanta's mother Shikha Rakshit filed a case against 11 people with Kotwali Police Station and Fazole Karim and another five were named in the charge sheet later.

Workers call off indefinite

strike at Mongla Port

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Mongla Port Dock Workers Union yesterday agreed to withdraw their indefinite strike following a successful discussion with the government.

The government agreed to allocate Tk 12 crore for the golden handshake to 1,200 workers.

"The discussion was fruitful and the workers agreed to withdraw the strike, which was to begin today," Mongla Port Authority (MPA) Chairman Commodore (rtd) MK Alam told The Daily Star last night.

The MPA chairman, joint director of labour and representatives from the local administration were present at the discussion with the labour leaders led by President of Mongla Port Dock Sramik Sangha Khalilur Rahman.

Hasina slams shrine blast

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leader of the Opposition in Parliament and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina in a statement yesterday said the bomb blast incident at the shrine of saint Shahjalal on Monday night was a 'planned attack by an identified group'.

Expressing her grave concern over the bomb explosion, Hasina said "the heinous act of poisoning Gojar fish at the pond of the shrine was also done by the same group."

Hasina said the incident of bomb blast took place following Delwar Hossain Saidee's remarks about Urs at a Mahfil in Sylhet on January 2. At the Mahfil, Saidee criticised Urs and called for resisting the programme, she added.

The AL chief demanded exemplary punishment to the culprits. Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain has also expressed grave concern over the incident and demanded arrest of and punishment to the persons involved.

Sylhet shrine

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They said the fact that no-one from the ruling party visited the shrine goes to show the government's apathy about the tragic incident.

A team of army bomb experts visited the place of occurrence and surrounding areas in the early hours of yesterday. They collected samples of bomb splinters and other evidences.

A 70-strong contingent of the paramilitary BDR (Bangladesh Rifles) together with a contingent of police has cordoned off a 2000-square-foot area around the spot where the bomb went off at around 8:30pm on Monday in the middle of a huge crowd, about 60 yards from the mausoleum.

The law-enforcers will remain deployed there indefinitely, official sources said.

Elsewhere within the precincts of the shrine and the adjacent mosque, this correspondent saw thousands of devotees chanting and praying at around 4:00am, only a few hours after the blast.

The deputy inspector general (DIG) of police (Sylhet Range) formed a 4-member committee of police officials to investigate the explosion. The committee has been instructed to report to the DIG within seven days.

Requesting anonymity, a senior police official hinted that the bomb went off minutes after it was planted, possibly a few inches underground.

A brother of the shrine's caretaker filed an FIR with the Kotwali Police yesterday and demanded punishment to the culprits.

He said that over several days leading up to the bomb blast, shrine authorities received anonymous phone calls threatening to disrupt the Urs.

The caretaker's family sources also alleged that authorities of the adjacent madrasah did not allow car parking facilities on their premises under pressure from the Jamaat-e-Islami that has allegedly been trying to thwart the Urs programme.

Kotwali police picked up 24 people from nearby areas and began interrogating them yesterday afternoon, a police official said.

The 2-day Urs ended through a manajat after Fajr prayers. Several thousand people were still in the area yesterday evening.

UPDF men

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Naniarchar upazila, killed three and abducted 10 villagers apparently for sheltering UPDF men.

Police could not make any headway into the incident, as the abducted are still missing and the attackers at large. But police filed a murder case, said sources in District Special Branch (DSB) of police.

JCD, Shibir men

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witnesses and policemen.

The ICS cadres drove all JCD men out of the campus and occupied the residential halls by 6:00pm.

"Both groups used firearms and the ICS cadres used sophisticated ones," said a senior police official, wishing to remain unnamed.

In the afternoon, a group of JCD men beat up non-student ICS cadre Tuhi in front of the Agrani Bank, RU Branch, while he was reportedly selling admission forms in the black market.

The ICS cadres in retaliation attacked the JCD tent on the campus and all the male residential halls simultaneously. They also ransacked rooms of the JCD workers after locking the hall gates.

The ICS cadres damaged at least a dozen rooms of different halls and burnt party assets and portraits of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her son Tarique Rahman, sources at the halls said.

"The rooms of the Madar Bux and Habibur Rahman halls bore the brunt of the attack," a RU teacher said.

During the clashes, ICS cadres threatened RU correspondent of the Daily Ittefaq Ismail Hossain Murad with death and asked other journalists to leave the campus.

An hour later, both groups locked in a violent clash behind the administrative building. But police intervened and dispersed both groups

lobbing teargas canisters. "At least 30 teargas shells were lobbed," said Wahidur Rahman a senior police officer posted on the campus.

At 3:30pm, RU authorities initiated a reconciliation meeting which failed as the JCD workers assaulted RU Students' Advisor Prof Rafiqul Islam, alleging that he aided and abetted the ICS-sponsored black marketing of admission forms.

However, taking advantage of the lull in the clashes for about half an hour, ICS men captured the vantage points on the campus and in the residential halls.

The ejected JCD workers gathered on Dhaka-Rajshahi Highway and obstructed traffic movement for two hours. They also damaged two passenger buses, sources said.

Tension gripped the campus as huge contingents of armed police were deployed to avert further clashes.

When contacted, RU JCD General Secretary Aslam Reza blamed RU authorities for the clashes. "If they had acted on our previous complaints of black marketing of forms, the incidents would not have happened."

RU ICS President Rezaul Karim said it was in retaliation against a JCD attack on his organisation's tent on the campus.

University authorities have called a meeting to discuss the situation and none of them could be contacted for comments.

Huge arms, drugs

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ascertain whether the arrestees are of any outlawed political party or operatives of an organised gang of drug-peddlers, who collected the arms and ammunition to facilitate drug smuggling, or firearms smugglers and whether they worked as hit-men.

"We're yet to extract any conclusive information from the arrestees, but we hope to make a headway in two or three days," the CID chief said.

Police suspect that more firearms and ammunition might be in the possession of the gang.

During the raid, police arrested 17 people including two caretakers from the computer office housed on the first floor of a six-storey building at 1307/D, Monipur at Kafur.

The arrestees are Abdul Wahed Bulbul, Mahmudul Hasan, Tariqul Islam Kiron, Mizanur Rahman Jahed, Sohan Ahmad Jyoti, Shahadat Hossain Saikat, Rafiqul Islam, Pradip Kumar Sarkar, Sayeed Hasan Ripon, Hamidur Rahman Chowdhury, Monir Hossain, Hasmat Ullah, Noor Mohammad, Farid Hossain,

Mohammad Ibrahim, Jasim and Abdul Mannan.

CID officials said eight of the arrestees were from Bheramara and Doulatpur in Kushtia, a den of outlawed parties.

Police said Abdul Wahed Bulbul rented the flat about two and a half years ago and recently made it a den of criminals and a storehouse of arms, ammunition and contraband drugs under the camouflage of computer sales, service and networking business.

Two separate cases under the Arms Act and Narcotics Control Act and one on charge of assembling arms and ammunition for committing crime were lodged with Kafur Police Station yesterday.

Earlier, on October 14 last year, police recovered an abandoned US-made M-16 rifle with 236 bullets from Ashulia and, on November 30, seized four AK-47 assault rifles, two revolvers, 20 hand grenades, four time bombs and a large number of AK-47 ammunition from a signboard shop at Kuril.

However, no headway has been made in the sensational arms and ammunition haul cases.

UN team

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thorny problem in the way of the peace process initiated by the 1997 CHT peace treaty that ended a two-decade tribal insurgency in the region, PCJSS leaders were quoted as telling the UN team.

They said any peace initiative that fails to address the 'honourable rehabilitation' of the region's thousands of indigenous internal refugees would be unwelcome.

On the other hand, Bangalee leaders demanded that their community be brought under the donor-sponsored development programmes in the region without any discrimination.

In a written statement to the UN team, Bangalee Chhatra Parishad, a student organisation of local Bangalees, alleged that they are treated unfairly by donor organisations in terms of jobs, which, they said, are awarded mostly to the indigenous people.

During the team's Khagrachhari visit, local Bangalees staged a demonstration demanding equal rights.

The high-profile UN team reportedly rushed to the CHT after the PCJSS raised objection regarding the potential beneficiaries of the UNDP-aided income generating and confidence building project through its CHT Development Facility (CHTDF) field office in

Rangamati.

The first phase of the one-year project was launched on July 14 last year after a long security assessment and a one-year study reflecting the opinions of all parties involved in the CHT peace process, sources said.

AL may boycott

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possible under the BNP-Jamaat coalition government. So, the possibility of our participation in the Kushtia by-elections is very slim," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said.

The AL Parliamentary Party will review the latest political situation and take a final decision on joining the by-polls by January 18, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Some smaller opposition parties including Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) will contest the by-polls.

Nomination papers for the by-elections are to be submitted by January-24, scrutiny of nomination papers will take place on January 25 and the last date for withdrawal of nomination is February 8.

The AL has boycotted all by-polls, except for the Netrokona-3 ballot, held after the October 1 general elections in 2001. The BNP candidate was elected in Netrokona-3 and the AL rejected the polls results raising allegations of rigging.

Indo-Bangla

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start of the census as a milestone in cross-border collaboration to protect globally significant biodiversity.

Attempts to assess the number of Bengal tigers in the Sundarbans have been undertaken before using satellite images and a method called 'sampling', where tigers are counted in particular habitats and the figures are extrapolated to estimate numbers in similar habitats.

However, a method that involves collecting impressions of tigers' footprints left in the mangrove mud during low tide has proved most accurate. From the footprints scientists can ascertain the age, weight and gender of an animal. This method will be used by the census teams.

Earlier this week, six officials from the Bangladesh Forest Department travelled to West Bengal to join their Indian counterparts to begin the census, said the press release. They will also learn new skills for trapping 'stray' tigers and relocating them in the wild. Upon their return, the Bangladesh officials will train a further 200 forest department staff in the new techniques.

The joint tiger census is expected to begin in the first half of February in the Bangladesh part of the Sundarbans, and Indian experts will work with the survey teams here.

The census is expected to reach all corners of the world's largest mangrove forest and provide the first consolidated population figures on the Bengal Tiger.

Local communities living in and around the Sundarbans will be consulted during the census for their firsthand knowledge about the habits of tigers.

To further preserve the dwindling tiger population these communities will receive training on helping to relocate 'stray' tigers.

"As a safety precaution villagers generally kill tigers that wander too close to their settlements. We estimate that five to six stray animals are killed by villagers in Bangladesh each year," UNDP Programme Officer Aminul Islam said.

Relocating tigers with the help of local communities has proved very effective in India, where villagers now alert the forest department of potentially troublesome animals.

Don't make mid-term

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after meeting with the RRC at the ministry conference room.

The finance minister told RRC members though he wanted to implement all the recommendations, reality might not permit so, meeting sources said quoting the minister.

Referring to the culture of tax evasion by commercial enterprises, the minister said, "Although the Gulshan-Banani area hosts hundreds of hotels, restaurants and fast food joints, only a few establishments like Pizza Hut pay taxes properly."

An NBR top official said, "Litigation remains a very complex and defeating system for the government in collecting tax. Besides, lawyers also do not cooperate with the NBR. When we file case against a tax evader, big lawyers demand cash payment for representing us. But the government can't pay cash, as its system dictates payment in cheques. Therefore, big lawyers do not work for us."

The RRC report touches upon all aspects of tax and revenue collection, including black money, foreign travel tax, land tax, customs clearance process, bonded warehouse, duty drawback and laws and rules.

On black money and tax evasion, the RRC recommends continuation of the amnesty given to untaxed income, if the income-holders invest the money in productive activities.

The RRC suggests cancellation of the tax holiday system and introduction of a uniform reduced tax rate for the industrial sector.

The government should scrap the pre-shipment inspection (PSI) system and instead introduce scanning devices to monitor shipments to save time and avoid harassment.

On the issue of scrapping the PSI, the finance minister told the

press. "We shall discuss with business people before we take a decision."

The RRC also maintains that the customs valuation system should be modernised. The customs department should subscribe to Reuters commodity price service, collect all international price bulletins and use, among other means, the internet as a source of information.

The RRC feels that the diplomatic bonded warehouses, EPZ commissars and hard currency shops should be abolished while duty-free shops should only operate at the airports.

To expand the Vat (value added tax) net, the RRC wants inclusion of 13 products and 25 services in it.

Among the products are locally-made ballpoint pens, cell-phones and different types of fibres.

Among the services are decorators in the cities, dental care centres, legal services, commercial coaching centres, translation and notary public services, tailoring services, building maintenance and cleaning, physicians, immigration advisors, commercially-run educational institutions, air-conditioned barber shops, broadband data transmission service, pre-paid calling cards including VoIP-enabled ones and pets.

Later on, the RRC says, agricultural products should also be brought under Vat.

"The government should aim at raising the tax-GDP (gross domestic product) ratio at the rate of 0.45 percent of GDP per annum in real terms till it reaches 12.61 percent of GDP by 2012," the RRC report says.

"For a country with 130 million people, the total number of income tax assesses is only 8.58,203 or 0.66 percent of the population. This is perhaps the lowest among the developing countries," RRC notes.

Dr Kamal accuses govt

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of judiciary clearly states how recruitment of judges should take place. The court cannot ignore that directive.