

Freedom fighters vow to join oust-govt move

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Muktijoddha Oikya Parishad, a united forum of 11 freedom fighters' organisations, yesterday expressed solidarity with today's countrywide shutdown and ongoing oust-government movement.

"We show our solidarity with tomorrow's hartal to protest attacks and repression on prominent political leaders and activists, writers and journalists in recent times," Mahubuddin Ahmed Bir Bikram read out from a statement at a press conference at Dhaka Reporters Unity.

"We also express our unequivocal support for the movement to topple the government," he added.

Mahubuddin, who commanded guard of honour to the interim government in exile during the liberation war, said replying to a question that they would take to the streets, if need be, to mobilise a mass uprising in the movement.

The statement went on to say that people's lives, property and honour are not safe today in the wake of crime, corruption and misrule, while murders, abductions, rape, extortion, politicisation and nepotism have hit new records.

Anti-liberation communal forces are in power today and public resources are being plundered abusing the state power. Violation of rule of law and human rights has become a day-to-day affair, the statement said.

The Parishad also presented a nine-point demand including

SEE PAGE 11 COL 8

BNP attacks Jubo League confce in Bogra

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Armed activists allegedly belonging to the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) yesterday attacked a conference of Jubo League, the youth front of the opposition Awami League, at Deogram Union under Kahlua upazila, leaving 10 people injured.

Witnesses said the BNP activists launched the attack while Jubo League was organising

a workers' rally at the conference venue at about 7:00pm. The attackers also ransacked the podium and set fire to it.

Police admitted that the incident took place but said that they were not sure whether the attackers belonged to the ruling BNP.

50 wounded in clash over land dispute in Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

About 50 madrasah students were injured in a one- and a half-hour armed clash apparently over a land dispute at Kazirbazar in the city yesterday morning.

Of the injured students, seven were admitted to the MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital, including five with bullet wounds that doctors consider being critical.

Locals said about 50 gunshots were fired during the combat.

Moulana Habibur Rahman, principal of Kazirbazar Madrasah, told the Daily Star they bought a 75-decime plot of land adjacent to the madrasah from Ataur Rahman, owner of Dolphin Bread Factory.

Rahman, also a Nayeb-e-Amir of ruling alliance partner Islami Oikya Jote, claimed, after paying a Tk 20-lakh price Thursday last, the madrasah officials took possession of the plot the same night. Some madrasah students have since been staying in a structure on the plot.

The principal said at Thursday midnight a police team from Kotwali Police Station came and asked the madrasah people to vacate the land immediately. But as they refused to do so, police left the area at about 1:30am yesterday.

Locals said, at around 10am

SEE PAGE 11 COL 3

Prayer Timings		
March 6		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fair	5-30	5-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-30	4-45
Maghrib	6-10	6-15
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation

Traders go vigilant, extortionists at bay

A tale of resistance at Karwan Bazar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Traders at Karwan Bazaar cry out loud to shoo extortionists who have long terrorised the neighbourhood and robbed them of their hard-earned money.

After putting up with years of extortion, fish wholesalers have devised an ingenious method that has been successful to some degree in keeping at bay at least the petty criminals who pestered traders for money every day.

From 6:00 till 9:00 in the morning for the last two weeks, stalwarts of the campaign against market extortion have been com-

ing out with loudspeakers, blaring out warnings to extortionists to steer clear of the bazaar area and asking traders to catch them on sight and immediately inform the committee of the fish aarot (depot).

"Brothers of the community, do not let anyone extort money from you. If anyone bothers you for money, hold the culprit and inform the committee," goes the announcement.

Besides asking them not to bow down to criminals, the message also strives to instil the virtue of honesty in traders. "Please do not cheat customers. Measure out the

right amount of goods and never misbehave with them. Violators will be strictly dealt with."

Traders of four fish wholesale depots -- Sonali, Jasimuddin, Muktijoddha and Ekota -- formed the committee about two weeks ago to fight extortionists, muggers and pickpockets and punish unscrupulous merchants who cheat people with measurements.

Although the loudspeakers wreak havoc on the hearing, traders happily put up with it as long as it works as a deterrent to the crim-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



Ann Cooper, executive director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, addresses a press conference in Dhaka, also attended by other delegates Iqbal Athas, far left, Abi Wright, second from left, and Andreas Harsono, far right.

Magistrate lives out death threat

Because he detected and fined 650 launches and cargo vessels for foul play in 4 months

RAFIQ HASAN

Instead of being rewarded, a magistrate who showed extraordinary courage trying to prevent unfit vessels from plying rivers has been transferred and is now living under death threats by unscrupulous people.

Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, first class magistrate, was transferred to Chittagong Port last month as special magistrate from the Department of Shipping, where he was working as marine safety officer.

During his four-month tenure as marine safety officer, he detected and fined more than 650

launches and cargo vessels for foul play, contributing around Tk 40 lakh to government revenue.

Just a week after joining his new post under Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) last month, Munir received a letter under the banner of 'repressed people of Chittagong' threatening him with death unless he leaves Chittagong in a month.

The letter accused Munir of acting for the port depriving people and said hired killer groups would kill him any time.

Later, CPA Chairman Shahadat Hossain filed a general diary with port police and the authorities deployed additional police per-

sonnel at the magistrate's office and residence for his security.

The magistrate told The Daily Star over telephone that despite the threat, he would perform his duties without any fear and favour.

Munir was brought to Dhaka from Chittagong Port in August last year as marine safety officer of the Department of Shipping in the wake of the July 8 launch disaster in the Meghna killing about 600 people. He was posted at Sadarghat launch terminal and entrusted with the task of conducting a special drive against foul play in the inland

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

AL threatens to lay siege to CMP office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Awami League leaders here yesterday threatened to lay siege to the office of Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) Commissioner at Laldighi, if any attempt to foil today's hartal is made by the police.

The warning came from a rally of Chittagong city north and south district units of Awami League at the Central Shaheed Minar premises in the afternoon.

Chittagong (north) district AL president and former minister Engineer Mosharrif Hossain presided over the rally, which was addressed by, among others, AL central leader Ataur Rahman Khan Kaiser, Chittagong city Mayor and Chittagong city AL General Secretary ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury, Chittagong (south) district AL General Secretary Moslem Uddin Ahmed, and Chittagong (south) district AL General Secretary MA Salam.

Later, a huge procession was brought out that ended at the Awami League office in Darul Fazal market.

The Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) also held separate rallies at Cinema Palace and New Market premises in support of today's hartal. Both the rallies were followed by processions.

B Chy, leftists blast govt for harbouring crime

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Condemning the gory attack on Humayun Azad and the police atrocity on Dhaka University (DU) students, some politicians yesterday blamed the government for criminalisation of politics.

In a statement yesterday, former president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury expressed deep shock over the police brutality on the DU campus Wednesday that left over a hundred students injured.

Condemning the multi-pronged assault launched by police and BNP's student wing members on students demonstrating against the hacking on Professor Azad, Chowdhury demanded exemplary punishment of those responsible for the violence.

He also urged the government to refrain from harbouring such criminal activities in politics and to protect people's democratic rights to organise rallies and processions.

At a public meeting at Muktangan in the city yesterday, the alliance of left-leaning four parties -- Jatiya Gano Front, Biplobi Oikya Front, Ganoatantrik Majdur Party and Ganosanghati Andolon -- condemned the police onslaught on general students and demanded immediate arrest of the attackers on Azad.

Criticising the government's attitude and role, the alliance leaders observed its undemocratic and fascist characteristics were mani-

SEE PAGE 11 COL 6

JCD attacks bus carrying BCL men at Mirersarai: 18 injured

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Some 18 leaders and workers of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) were injured in an attack by the activists of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) and Juba Dal in Mirersarai upazila on Thursday.

Sources said the BCL men came under attack while they were returning to the upazila headquarters in a bus from a conference of Osmanpur Union unit of the student body at about 6:00pm.

Armed cadres of the JCD and Juba Dal intercepted the bus at Azam Bazar and beat up the BCL leaders and workers, they said.

The injured include Alauddin, president of the BCL Mirersarai upazila unit, Tahmidul Haq, general secretary of the unit and Zafar, Ashraf and Nayon of Chittagong (north) district unit of the BCL. They were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, Chittagong (north) district unit of the BCL yesterday staged a rally in front of Darul Fazal Market protesting the attack. The speakers demanded immediate arrest and punishment of the persons involved.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7



PHOTO: STAR

Hawker Mahfuzur Rahman sells his flimsy goods at Barolekha in Sylhet. A one-time beggar, Mafuzur is trying to break out of grinding poverty with a tiny loan of Tk 500 he borrowed from the Grameen Bank under a programme aimed at bringing sunshine to lives on the fringe of society.

Grameen Bank plan for beggars

RAFIQ HASAN

Wheelchair-bound Kohinoor Mian, 60, of Pathantola in Dhamrai near Dhaka begs from door to door. He earns Tk 200-300 a day, but he has to share the money with a boy who pushes his chair.

"If I get some money, I'll set up a dairy farm and give up begging," Kohinoor told The Daily Star.

"I was a professional cook in a decorator shop a year ago, but I became paralysed after an accident. Now I have nothing else to do, but to beg without active hands and legs," a weeping Kohinoor said.

He has recently bought a goat at Tk 800 and two chickens. He dreams of augmenting his cash by selling goats and eggs to set up a dairy farm.

He has got a microloan of Tk 1,000 from the Grameen Bank.

Physically challenged Khodeza, 35, of the same village bought a sack of flour for selling retail. She sells a kg at Tk 15 at her house, making a profit of Tk 1 a kg. She begged for a living a few months ago.

Ismail, 45, of Nagarkunda village in Savar also begged only three months ago. Now he sells pickles in front of schools and at busy road crossings.

He sells pickles of Tk 200 to Tk

300 a day to earn a profit of Tk 70 to 100. With the money, he has to feed a five-member family.

Ismail, who suffered from tuberculosis, got a Tk 1,000 collateral-free small credit from the Grameen Bank to start his business.

He repays Tk 22 a week for his loan.

After Ismail began his business, his wife Jamila also stopped begging. He is now happy for breaking out of the 'life of ignominy'. "People always look down on beggars," he said.

Kohinoor, Khodeza and Ismail

SEE PAGE 11 COL 7

Phase II of adult literacy programme launched

Donors unhappy with govt's handling

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

The government has launched the second phase of its non-formal adult literacy programme at a cost of Tk 567 crore to retain 17 lakh students of the Total Literacy Movement (TLM) -- the programme that miserably failed to carry out its mandate.

Termining the programme "a total waste of resources", Prime Minister Khaleda Zia last year blasted the key people implementing the Tk 683 crore TLM project for siphoning off funds through assigning 'sign-board' or fake NGOs.

TLM authorities claimed to have educated over 92 lakh people. But the prime minister herself rejected the claim, irked by the fact that people remained illiterate in many places as the NGOs assigned for the

project did not carry out their duties.

Sources alleged that a close aide of the premier who was in charge of steering the project siphoned off funds through her eight 'signboard' NGOs.

The prime minister was so angry that in November last year she abolished the Directorate of Non-formal Education (DNFE) -- the implementing body for the project -- for alleged corruption, misappropriation of funds and lack of quality, and fired its 378 officers and employees.

But donors strongly objected to the shutdown of the directorate as the root of corruption lay elsewhere.

The government did not take action against the real culprits including the premier's aide who is now steering the second phase of

the project.

Once again, the government is hiring NGOs to implement the second phase of the project dubbed Post Literacy and Continuing Education Programme for Human Development (PLCEPHD) aimed at 'improving the acquired basic skills of the neo-adult literate and providing them with training to become self-reliant'.

With abolition of the DNFE, there is no exclusive implementing authority for the non-formal adult literacy programme, and the government has placed its new project under the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE).

The government move has also drawn disapproval of donors, who

SEE PAGE 11 COL 1

Series of blasts shake Baghdad

REUTERS, Baghdad

Several explosions echoed across Baghdad yesterday, hours before the Iraqi Governing Council was due to sign a transitional constitution.

A loud blast reverberated through the city centre at around 11:30 am local time, rattling windows across the river from the main US headquarters. There were no further details.

Earlier, a US military spokesman said there had been six or seven blasts at Baghdad international airport southwest of the city, where there is a major US base, between 10:15 and 10:30 am there were no reports of damage or injuries.

US bases across the country regularly come under fire from mortars and grenades.

Police in the Ameriyah district in the west of the capital said a road-

side bomb had detonated at around 9:30 am local time, leaving a crater in the street but causing no casualties.

The council had delayed the signing for two days out of respect for at least 181 people killed in a series of attacks on Tuesday.

Three people were killed in the capital on Thursday in a rocket attack. There are frequent explosions in Baghdad, some caused by roadside bombs planted by insurgents, others controlled by US troops destroying ordnance.

Soldiers from the US-led coalition in Iraq shot dead three Iraqi attackers in a gun fight in Mosul overnight, without sustaining any injuries, a US military spokesman said yesterday.

It was unclear whether the troops had been American, the spokesman added.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 4

Joint forces recover arms from the Sundarbans

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The joint forces, acting upon a tip-off, recovered 11 guns and 500 live cartridges on Thursday afternoon from the Sundarbans. The arms and ammunition were concealed beneath the ground at the compartment no. 38 under Chandpai range of eastern wing of the Sundarbans Forest Division.

The recovered guns, made in USA, were handed over to Mongla thana police. They allegedly belonged to notorious pirate Motalab Shaikh (40), who was arrested by the joint forces from Rahimnagar under Rupsha upazila on Wednesday. Motalab is the ringleader of an inter-district gang of pirates, said Shibli Sadik, captain of the joint forces, conducting operation in the Sundarbans.