

Return to JS, quit hartal

FROM PAGE 1
opposition causes countrywide.

"The Awami League has long been isolated from the people because of its misdeeds when in power and nowadays it has become further and completely alienated due to its anti-people programmes and campaigns. So, people don't respond to its calls... if it persists in such programmes, it'll disappear." So, she counselled the AL that it still had time to gain back people's confidence by returning to the Jatiya Sangsad (JS), leaving the path of hartals, vehicle burning and destructive acts.

Khaleda alleged the AL when in power ruined all state institutions including education and didn't believe in democracy, rule of law and development. To produce a contrast, she mentioned a few of her government's development programmes and claimed a balanced development was now taking place.

State Minister for Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment and local BNP lawmaker Major (Retd) Quamrul Islam presided over the meeting.

BNP Secretary General and LGRD Minister A Mannan Bhuiyan, Health Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain, Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, Women and Children Affairs Minister Khurshid Jahan Haq, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Housing

and Public Affairs Minister Mirza Abbas, State Minister for Labour Amanullah Aman, Jatiyatobadi Jubo Dal President Barkatullah Bulu and General Secretary Moazzem Hossain Alal MP, City BNP General Secretary Abdus Salam, Jatiyatobadi C h a r a D a l P r e s i d e n t Shahabuddin Laltu and other local leaders of BNP and its front organisations also addressed the rally. Besides, Information Minister Tariqul Islam, Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury and some other senior BNP leaders were also present.

Charging AL President Sheikh Hasina for spreading false and misleading information Mannan Bhuiyan alleged all figures related to murder, rape and other crimes disseminated by Hasina were absolutely false.

He said the government withdrew the false and politically motivated cases filed against BNP leaders and activists during the previous regime of AL, but not the murder cases without investigation.

Moudud Ahmed said the government ensured rule of law in the country and introduced speedy trial that meted out 456 death sentences for various gruesome crimes.

Earlier, Khaleda inaugurated construction of Gulshan-Badda-Progati Sarani Link Road and said that a good number of development works would be undertaken soon.

Initiate nat'l dialogue

FROM PAGE 1
economic decisions must be taken based on a strategy which ensures development benefits for all, expands employment opportunities and encourage investment and productive activities.

In a charter placed before the elite audience, he also showed the ways of establishing the rule of law by appointing an independent ombudsman, impartial functioning of police and freeing the politics and election from black money, terrorism and communalism.

In his speech on "political reforms to promote democracy and economic development in Bangladesh", the Gono Forum president referred to various important issues -- absence of good governance, citizen's initiative, role of business community and activation of parliament.

"A sensible approach would be for the current session of parliament to give the highest priority in its agenda to a serious review of the law and order situation, and overall national security. The opposition should be involved in this review," he said.

Referring to his visit across the

country for last couple of months and talks with commoners and professionals ahead of the planned national convention to be held on March 14, Dr Kamal said people underlined the need for restoration of the rule of law.

It could only be done through impartial and effective law enforcement and immediate end to political interference, which provided protection to criminals, he said, mentioning that the same view was reflected by the members of a parliamentary standing committee.

On political patronisation of criminals, the Gono Forum president said this was seen as the main cause why law enforcement agencies were seen to be failing to discharge their duties. "No effective inquiry was taking place, offenders were not detected even after several months elapsed," he said.

"The deterioration of law and order, the terrorisation of citizens by politically-patronised godfathers, political interference in law enforcement and the role of black money which had been taking place under successive governments, has continued to deteriorate," Dr Kamal said.

JS reserved seats

FROM PAGE 12
press for cancelling the government's decision. It would demonstrate her sincerity towards our demand."

Shirin Akhter, president of Karmajibi Nari, alleged that the law minister assured them of considering the demand, but in reality he did not even hear.

Aysha Khanum accused the law minister of uttering very objectionable words in parliament as he said the time has not yet come for the women to take part in direct polls.

Among others, Rokeya Kabir, executive director of Bangladesh Nari Progati Sangha, Prof Mahmuda Islam of Women for Women and Shifa Hafiz of Brac attended the conference.

Besides, different political parties and social activists continued to reject the government's decision.

Former law minister Abdul Marik Khan said the decision for proportionate distribution is not only very much contrary to the spirit of democracy, but also a sheer disregard for the women by this government. He said the proposed bill does not provide any accountability for the women parliamentarians, as there are no constituencies for the reserved seats provisioned with it.

Ivy Rahman of Mahila Awami League called for a social movement to reject the decision.

Bangladesh Communist Party

(CPB) said that the decision is a betrayal and it is a ploy to distribute women's seats among the ruling parties.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) rejecting the decision said it goes against the consensus among all women's rights groups and political parties in favour of direct election. They also said the move would institutionalise the partisan politics and demanded 64 reserved seats for women in parliament.

Bangladesh Workers' Party at its meeting chaired by its President Rashed Khan Menon declared the move as unacceptable and said it is an insult to our women.

HC issues

FROM PAGE 12
The bench comprising Justice M Abdul Matin and Justice Syed Refat Ahmed yesterday also stayed the order of suspension on the petitioner.

The contempt rule was issued upon the IGP Shahudul Haq, Assistant IGP (Security) AKM Shahidul Haq, Deputy Police Commissioner of Chittagong M M a h b u b M o h s i n a n d Superintendent of Police, Jessore, M Shahidul Islam.

Earlier on January 27, the High Court in a contempt case found the IGP guilty of misconduct and fined him Tk 2000. The Supreme Court had stayed execution of the High Court verdict.

Advocate Ozaer Farooq and Mohammad Hossain appeared for the petitioner.

BNP for no-hartal

FROM PAGE 12
opposition leaders over phone within a couple of days, although such efforts by him in the recent past failed to produce any tangible results.

Mannan Bhuiyan levelled charges against the AL of nurturing and protecting criminals. "BNP does not protect criminals. We are uncompromising on the issue of curbing terrorism," he said.

About the recent attack by BNP's student wing Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on peaceful demonstrations at Dhaka University, he said he had asked JCD leaders about the alleged incident and they told him they were not involved in it.

He claimed the government did not hinder political activities of the opposition but police prevented its leaders when they tried to break the law.

Reporters also pointed out to him that the cabinet's approval of a proposal Monday ran counter to BNP's election pledge of women's direct election to the parliament. He said: "It is because we could not determine the mechanism for holding such an election even though we had discussed the issue with many women leaders and groups."

DRU General Secretary Saleh Shibli introduced the discussion and DRU President Alamgir Hossain presided.

the success or failure of the government."

Mannan Bhuiyan levelled charges against the AL of nurturing and protecting criminals. "BNP does not protect criminals. We are uncompromising on the issue of curbing terrorism," he said.

About the recent attack by BNP's student wing Jatiyatobadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) on peaceful demonstrations at Dhaka University, he said he had asked JCD leaders about the alleged incident and they told him they were not involved in it.

He claimed the government did not hinder political activities of the opposition but police prevented its leaders when they tried to break the law.

Reporters also pointed out to him that the cabinet's approval of a proposal Monday ran counter to BNP's election pledge of women's direct election to the parliament. He said: "It is because we could not determine the mechanism for holding such an election even though we had discussed the issue with many women leaders and groups."

DRU General Secretary Saleh Shibli introduced the discussion and DRU President Alamgir Hossain presided.

Lalmoni Express detained for station demand

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Locals yesterday held up Lalmoni Express for three hours from noon demanding stoppage at Bonarpara railway station for the recently introduced train.

An angry mob halted the capital-bound train at Bonarpara, some 16 km off Gaibandha, putting up barricade on tracks and snapping railway signal system.

The inter-city express rolled on tracks at around 3:00pm only after the deputy commissioner, Gaibandha and superintendent of local police went to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Railway authorities also suspended Abdul Baten Mondal, stationmaster at Bonarpara station, for negligence in duty, sources said.

Talking to journalists at Gaibandha station, the divisional railway manager, Lalmoni said the agitators withdrew the blockade after Communications Minister Nazmul Huda assured them of solving the issue through dialogue.

During its maiden journey on March 7, locals blocked the express train at the same spot for an hour to press home their demand.

Ctg port to sell off 500 unclaimed containers

UNB, Chittagong

To free space for smooth loading and unloading in the Chittagong Port shed, the authorities have decided to put unclaimed 500 containers on auction that may fetch some Tk 200 crore.

The Chittagong Port Authority and Customs Authority jointly took the decision at a meeting Monday.

"The auction process of various cargoes worth Tk 200 crore will be completed in three months," said Customs Commissioner AM Mosur Ahmed after the meeting.

The meeting was held at the Port Bhaban in presence of port Chairman AMM Shahadat Hossain and the Customs Commissioner.

Meeting sources said the decision was taken to make 10 percent space of the port free for smooth port operation.

A total of 13,000 tons of unclaimed goods have been left abandoned in the port shed for several years. Of the total, 9,000 tons will be auctioned and the rest 4,000 tons of beverage items destroyed.

5 Guantanamo Britons head home

REUTERS, London

Five Britons jailed for more than two years at the U.S. Guantanamo base in Cuba headed home Tuesday -- posing anti-terror police a dilemma over whether to release them to families or keep them behind bars.

The men, held since late 2001 or early 2002 with more than 600 others suspected of fighting with the Taliban in Afghanistan or supporting al Qaeda, were expected to reach the Northolt military air base near London around 7 p.m.

Azad's health

FROM PAGE 12

for better treatment.

Ja'lid said in a press release that the AL is holding talks with Azad's family for his transfer to a foreign hospital and sought government cooperation in this regard.

People are confused due to the differences between the family members' statements and ISPR bulletins about his health, he added.

Dhaka, Delhi

FROM PAGE 1

trade missions in some northeastern Indian states like Tripura and Assam.

Bangladesh raised the issues of various non-tariff barriers India has imposed in importing goods from Bangladesh.

Regarding the huge trade deficit in favour of India, Shashank said the deficit and all other related issues could be resolved once bilateral trade negotiation begins.

He also expressed satisfaction at BIMST-EC (Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation) free trade agreement very soon.

Commerce Minister Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury hinted to reporters that the next bilateral trade negotiation might take place later this month or early next month.

He said the Indian side wanted to know about Bangladesh's position on gas export and broached the idea of setting up gas-based industries in the border areas in the absence of any positive decision on gas export.

Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Veena Sikri was present during the discussions.

The first round of negotiations for bilateral FTA was held in October last year. The second round was scheduled to be held at Delhi in January this year but was shifted to March. But that has also been postponed citing lack of preparation on both sides.

Angry China warns

FROM PAGE 1

the ambassador.

Referring not to be named, a minister told The Daily Star yesterday that the Chinese ambassador also met him and vented sheer frustration at the development.

"He told me the Taiwan issue will not only have negative impact on bilateral relations between the two countries but will also inflict unimaginable damage on Bangladesh," the minister said.

The envoy also claimed China has definite information that Taiwanese visa is being issued from a newly formed high trade representative office in Dhaka, said another influential minister.

Quoting Chinese intelligence report, he even told the minister that his country has had the information that a quarrel with the government on a particular ministry allowed Taiwan to open its office in favour of huge kickbacks.

During meetings, the ministers and policymakers assured the envoy of looking into the serious allegation and formed him that police have already seized the signboard of the trade office on Monday night, sources said.

Bangladesh has not shifted from its "One China policy" and will never recognise Taiwan as a separate state, the state's bigwigs reiterated Dhaka's position to Chai Xi. The ambassador however said his

Employers for fresh

FROM PAGE 1

recommend such a step.

Under the Minimum Wages Ordinance 1961, the government can determine minimum wages for specific sectors only, not for all, the delegation said.

Institution of a uniform national minimum wage should be avoided for the sake of industrial growth, as conditions of business, costing, marketing and so on vary from place to place, the delegates argued.

Forcing the industries to pay beyond their capacity will only lead to large-scale business closure, they told the minister, according to a BEF statement.

The delegation drew the minister's attention to a reference to the Minimum Wages Board made by the labour ministry in an agreement with the Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop). The BEF pointed out that sealing agreement with any unregistered workers body like Skop to meet its demands is illegal as per the Industrial Relations Ordinance 1969.

The BEF and its affiliated organisations -- Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and

50 VDP members food-poisoned

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogra

Fifty VDP officials fell sick, 13 of them critically, from food poisoning Monday.

Seventy-six Village Defence Party (VDP) officials of Rajshahi division came here on March 6 on a training programme. After taking rice, daal and crushed potato at supper, 50 of them became sick.

The ailing officials alleged that they were being fed sub-standard food since they turned up here. They even objected when they were served the low-quality meal Monday night.

The infected are receiving saline, said Abdul Mannan, officer-in-charge of the district adjutant. He also told newsmen that he does not know whether the afflicted are suffering from food poisoning.

Only Tk 40 per head is sanctioned for food every day, Mannan said, adding they have to manage three meals with it.

Pakistan tests N-capable

FROM PAGE 12

countries won independence from Britain in 1947.

The statement said Pakistan had informed neighbouring countries about the test as a "confidence-building" measure.

The test came after Israel last week concluded a deal to sell India a strategic airborne radar system despite warming ties between Islamabad and New Delhi.

Pakistan says the new missile exceeds the 930-mile reach of the Ghauri, previously its longest-range missile, which some experts say was developed with North Korean help.

The test of the Shaheen II comes amid intense scrutiny of Pakistan's nuclear program after revelations that its scientists sold nuclear secrets to Iran, North Korea and Libya.

"Our strategic force goals are guided by the concept of minimum credible deterrence and that's why we have to test these missiles from time to time," Foreign Ministry spokesman Masood Khan said Monday.

Khan said India and Pakistan had a policy of informing each other ahead of missile tests.

He said the aim of the test would be to ensure the "reach" of the missile was sufficient to deter aggression and "prevent military coercion."

India concluded a deal last week to buy an Israeli Phalcon airborne radar system, which Pakistan has complained will threaten its security and require steps to keep a balance between the two countries.

The Phalcon system can detect aircraft hundreds of miles away, can

country is no longer so sure about Dhaka's real stance, sources said.

He even cautioned them that Bangladesh would require a long time to repair the damage caused to the relationship. It will be hard for China to trust Bangladesh the way it did before, he said.

Realising the gravity of the Chinese reaction, the government top guns are going to meet the prime minister soon to devise ways to mend the twisted relationships.

China is also unhappy over the Bangladesh's lack of interest in implementing project agreements. The two countries signed MoUs two years back but the projects did not move forward as yet.

These schemes include 210mw Thermal Power Plant at Khulna, the Development of North Dhaka (East) Sewerage Treatment Plant and Pagla Water Treatment Project. The first two projects were under suppliers credit scheme while the Pagla project was summed up as inflated one.

These projects were supposed to kick-start during prime minister's tour of China last year. But the visit ended in an anti-climatic fashion when Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman urged his opposite number to renegotiate these projects, as not all the deals were favourable to Bangladesh. And there had been no progress since then.

Municipal chiefs slate decision to abolish local govt units

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Municipal Association of Bangladesh (Mab) yesterday expressed concern over a recent cabinet decision on appointing government officials in different local government bodies after abolishing those units.

Mab members at an emergency meeting said the decision contradicted Article 59 of the constitution and also a High Court verdict, a press release said.

Urging the government to withhold its decision, it further said the measure would cripple local government units instead of strengthening.

It also threatened to organise a rally of elected public representatives of various local government bodies in the capital and seek legal redress if the government sticks to its stand, it added.

Azmat Ullah Khan, president of the Mab and chairman of Tongi municipality, chaired the meeting.

The cabinet at a meeting on Monday decided to appoint civil servants in different local government units after abolishing those.

Spiralling prices

FROM PAGE 1
Laila Akhtar a long-time customer at New Market.

Traders explained that the increase in lentil prices is due to the usual supply shortage at this time of the year. Karwan Bazar wholesalers hoped the prices would come down to Tk 40-45 a kg in a month with fresh supplies from the current season's soutput.

Prices of flour and atta have jumped by Tk 12 and Tk 6-7 a kg. A two kg flour pack now sells at Tk 44 at Shantinagar Bazar and New Market Bazar, rising from Tk 36 a week ago. Traders blamed the increase on wheat price hike worldwide.

Battery chicken prices that shot up sharply in the wake of the recent bird flu scare still remain high while packed milk powder now sells at Tk 224 against the previous price of Tk 180.

But prices of onions have come down from Tk 22 to Tk 18 a kg. In case of flour pack, lentil onions and from Tk 20 to Tk 16 a kg for local variety while mutton prices have fallen sharply to Tk 150 a kg from Tk 180 over the last one week.

Prices of beef and vegetables remained stable while rice prices marked slight changes.

Banshkhali

FROM PAGE 12

him some specific questions.

Mahub first said a gang of 12 set fire to the house of Tejendra Lal Shil and his family at village Sadhanpara in Banshkhali. He claimed he tried to extinguish the fire and to dissuade others from committing the arson.

Then he said, "Of the 12, six including Mokhtar, Dola Meah, Rubel Akbar, Aminul Haq and me entered the house and six others were on guard outside. As the family members threw acid on us, Rubel ordered us to set the house afire."

He went on, "We followed his orders, shut all the doors and windows and Rubel set fire to the house."

"I was scheduled to leave for Saudi Arabia on March 13," he added.

At one stage, Mahub named Mokhtar as leader of the gang and said Dola Meah led the attackers.

Replying to a query, Mahub quoted Mokhtar as saying a local BNP leader and union parishad chairman, who is nephew of a state minister, hired them to do an important job but they did not know what the job was.

At this stage, ASP (DSB) Abdul Khaleque intervened again and asked him not to give 'irrelevant' statements before journalists.

Gen Mustafiz

FROM PAGE 1

brigadiers because of what he said was his father-in-law's influence on the then president HM Ershad.

Prominent lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain on behalf of Mustafiz issued the notice titled "Notice of Demand for Justice" terming the recommendation of the Jatiya Sangsad body as misconstruction.

"This is a deliberate misconstruction of the provisions of Army Regulations," the notices says.

Referring to Mustafiz's entry to politics after retirement, Mahub, also BNP lawmaker, told the February 26 meeting the army organogram did not support the rank of a four-star general and alleged the promotion was given on political grounds.

Dr Kamal in the notice referred the respondents to the page 202 of the army regulations, which highlights the post of a general to be appointed by the president.

"It further appears the parliamentary standing committee of defence was not fully apprised of the legal position and past precedents in this regard," he added.

Dr Kamal asked the government to consider the legal position and precedents before proceeding against his client further, which he said would meet legal challenge.

Chief of Army Staff Lieutenant General Hasan Mashud Chowdhury, Defence Secretary Ehsanul Haque, President's Secretary Meshbahuddin Ahmad and Major General Abdul Matin, also president's military secretary, were served with the notice.

Women's political

FROM PAGE 1

previous occasions: the elections to women's seats will take place after the elections to 300 general seats.

This means the ruling BNP has shifted from its poll pledge of introducing the provision of direct elections to the women's reserved seats and increasing the number of such seats. The other proposed changes in the constitution do not hold any significance except for the one that provides for mandatory display of the portraits of the president and the prime minister in offices of government, semi-government and autonomous organisations. The provision however is widely viewed as a politically motivated agenda of the government.

The issue of women's effective representation in parliament is as old as the country itself and the indirect election to the reserved seats started immediately independence and ran through to 2001 with a two-year pause from 1988 to 1990.

The 1972 constitution had the provision of 15 reserved seats for women and following an amendment the number was raised to 30 while the tenure of the reserved seats was extended to 15 years from 10 years. As the tenure of the seats expired in 1988, the fourth parliament had no reserved seats for women.

The Ershad government however amended the constitution in 1990, providing for another 10 years' extension to the reserved seats ignoring the demand of the women's rights groups for direct polls to the reserved seats. The tenure expired in 2001 with dissolution of the seventh parliament. The eighth parliament started its journey on October 28, 2001 without the reserved seats.

The Awami League government introduced a bill in the seventh parliament in June 17, 2000 seeking an additional 10-year extension to the reserved seats, which the women's rights groups rejected. They also demanded introduction of direct elections and an increase in the number.

However, the AL regime could not get the bill passed in the House due to its death of a two-thirds majority, unlike the incumbent coalition government, for amending the constitution. At that time, the main opposition BNP was boycotting parliament and had not attended any meeting while the bill was at the parliamentary standing committee on the law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry for scrutiny. The BNP had then declared that it would resolve the issue in the eighth parliament.

This time around, no scope is there for a broader discussion with the opposition on the bill when it goes to the standing committee on law ministry for scrutiny as all the eight lawmakers who sit on the crucial body belong to the BNP.

Tamil rebels reject

FROM PAGE 12

despite the amnesty offer made through the Bishop of Batticaloa Kingsley Swamipillai.

"It is ridiculous," Varadan told AFP by telephone. "It is they who should think of being forgiven by our people (in the east) for the sacrifices made to protect the land and the people of Wann (in the north)."

Karuna, who is an ethnic Tamil from the east of the island, broke away last week after accusing the LTTE's northern-based leadership of hogging key positions despite the bulk of the Tiger fighting force coming from the east.

Varadan said it was the east that had sent thousands of fighters to protect the lands of the northern Tamils, known as Jaffna Tamils, while the easterners better known as Batticaloa Tamils were used as cannon fodder.

LTTE political wing leader S. P. Thamilselvan said in remarks published on the rebels' website Tuesday that Karuna was acting alone and did not have support among the rank and file.

However, the