

Govt won't step down before its tenure ends

Mannan tells Sramik Dal rally

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan yesterday said the ruling party would go into the next election only after the present government completes its tenure.

Addressing a rally, Mannan, also Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives minister, said, "BNP won't resign even a day before completing the tenure of the government."

Jatityatabadi Sramik Dal, BNP's workers front, organised the rally at Paltan Maidan in the afternoon to mark its silver jubilee and in observance of May Day.

Bhuiyan asked the main opposition Awami League (AL) to apologise to people for setting the April 30 deadline for the fall of the present government. He also asked the AL to join parliament.

"If your seats fall vacant for absence in parliament, we will fill up those seats through by-polls," he said.

Proshika's culture

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to seize them," the senior officer said. Proshika Director (administration) Syed Giasuddin Ahmed said: "Police have written in their report that they did not find what they were looking for."

But Deputy Director (general administration) Parveen Mushtari said: "Police seized some documents, but I don't know what they are about."

About 30 law enforcers from Pallabi Police Station and traffic department mounted guard at the entry to the 14-storey Proshika Bhaban since 2:15pm.

Assistant Commissioner (Mirpur Zone) Kamrul Anshan, the officers-in-charge of Pallabi and Mirpur police stations, detectives and members of Special Branch (SB), Rapid Action Team and Directorate General Forces Intelligence entered the office. A SB superintendent of police led the raid.

The police team scoured different floors of the building and checked some files on computer on the second floor where deputy directors work and on the seventh floor where Proshika President Qazi Faruque Ahmed and the vice-president work. But Giasuddin said: "Police said they had a warrant of search, but did not ask us anything."

Political violence

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Hasan, assistant editor of daily Sangbad. Official Secrets Act is a major impediment to press freedom, said Shawkat Mahmud, general secretary of the Jatiya Press Club. He also asked the government to form a press commission for journalists.

Managing Editor of The Daily Star Syed Fahim Munayer, who moderated the discussion, said, "Full press freedom is there in the country, but we have to examine how far newspapers and journalists are free."

Among others, Gias Kamal Chowdhury, Reazuddin Ahmed, editor of The News Today, Motiur Rahman Chowdhury, Manabjanin chief editor, Sirajuddin Ahmed, editor of daily Dinkal, Borhan Ahmed, executive editor of daily Janakantha, Channel 1 Chief News Editor Shah Alamgir and Weekly Ananya Editor Tasmima Hossain participated in the discussion.

Human rights coalition Odhikar and newly formed media watchdog Article 39 jointly organised a discussion at Odhikar's office in Gulshan in the afternoon.

Speakers there asked the government to immediately enact and implement the proposed right to

BTRC

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set criteria, the BTRC chairman blamed the delay on difference of opinion between the state-owned telecoms monopoly Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board (BTB) and private operators over setting up of an internet exchange for the VoIP traffic.

BTB had been pursuing for the exchange on anticipation of its revenue loss, but private operators were reluctant about the exchange and preferred call termination via VSAT (very small aperture terminals).

"We have resolved the problem after discussing the issue with the prime minister at a meeting of the national ICT taskforce," Murnshed said. Now there will be no internet exchange before connecting the country with the information superhighway via undersea cables, he added.

Grameen Bank Managing Director Prof Muhammad Yunus and Vice-chancellor of Brac (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee) University Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury are among the proponents of the idea as they believe Bangladesh's internet traffic would ultimately be diverted via the transcontinental submarine cables once the country gets hooked to the information superhighway.

BTB introduced VoIP to generate calls to 10 countries without licence, a move that private operators say is against BTRC's level-playing field concept.

Referring to the three-point demand of the AL, the BNP secretary general said, "We urged them to join parliament to discuss their three-point, but they didn't."

Addressing it, Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed alleged the AL was engaged in a conspiracy to destroy the country's economy and tried to hoodwink people by setting the April 30 deadline. He also asked the main opposition to join parliament and shun "the politics of destruction and anarchy."

Sramik Dal President Nazrul Islam Khan chaired the rally. Among others, State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman, senior BNP leader KM Obaidur Rahman and Nasir Uddin Hameed Pinto, also spoke at the rally.

After the rally, Tarique Rahman, senior joint secretary general of the BNP, led a Sramik Dal procession which paraded different city streets.

Police scanned files and audio- and video-tapes in the reporting section on the ninth floor and quizzed some officials on their work.

Police did not let journalists enter the office until the raid ended at 5:15pm. Many Proshika officials who went out for lunch had to wait outside. But police let some employees leave the office during the sweep.

The law enforcers refused to talk to the waiting journalists and left in a hurry. "Don't ask me anything. I cannot talk about it," said AC Kamrul Anshan, who was in a rush to board his jeep.

DENIAL OF LINKS

Proshika fell foul of the government as it allegedly threw its weight behind the Awami League for a campaign during the last general elections and the recent anti-government agitation ahead of April 30.

Faruque Ahmed said: "The government's allegation against Proshika is not true."

"The government earlier failed to prove the allegation (of assisting the AL) it brought against me after it came to power. The government repeats that it has proof."

"It's a conspiracy against us. Raising the allegations, the government is trying to justify its mass arrests and intimidating our officials into giving false statements," he said.

information act for ensuring people's fundamental right to know.

Farid Hossain, Dhaka bureau chief of the Associated Press, presented a keynote paper on "Threats on Fair Journalism: State of Press Freedom in Bangladesh" and Dr Asif Nazul, adviser of Article 39 and teacher of Dhaka University's law department, presented another paper on "Right to Information Act" at the discussion chaired by Odhikar Director Masud Alam Ragib Anshan.

According to a report prepared by Odhikar, five journalists were killed and 281 others injured in the country in criminal attacks during January 2001 to December 2003.

The report said 864 media personnel were repressed and harassed and of them 54 were arrested during the period.

In 2003, 65 journalists were injured, 19 arrested, 20 abducted, 41 assaulted, 90 threatened with death and 62 sued, it added.

Three journalists were killed, 102 injured, 30 arrested, three kidnapped, 39 assaulted, 147 threatened and 139 others sued in 2002 while two journalists were killed and 114 were injured and five arrested in 2001.

Media for People, a media-based organisation, holds a discussion and candle lighting programme at Liberation War Museum in Segun Bagicha at 6:00 this evening to mark the day. Different organisations will also hold various programmes across the country on the occasion.

Bangladesh, Kuwait

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Colonel Ali Hasan Khaja attended the occasion.

Joint Secretaries to the defence ministry Brigadier General Ismat Amed Chowdhury, Bir Protik M Almusshah and Director of Personnel Administration of Bangladesh Army Brigadier General Hameed-al-Hasan represented the Bangladesh side.

The new accord has replaced the previous two agreements signed on May 15, 1991 and on December 15, 1992.

The new agreement will take immediate effect and remain valid for six years. "The agreement is renewable for similar periods unless terminated through mutual consent," said a Kuwaiti embassy release.

"Bangladesh Armed Forces under the agreement will depute military personnel to the Ministry of Defence of Kuwait to render primarily technical and vocational services," said a statement of the ISPR.

Currently, some 3,600 members including skilled civilian personnel of Bangladesh Armed Forces are serving in the oil-rich Gulf state under the two previous agreements, the state-

Contempt plea against media man rejected

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday summarily rejected plea of a city magistrate to draw contempt proceedings against a UNB reporter for writing that she (magistrate) stood up and saluted a minister as he entered the court in a defamation suit.

Editors and publishers of The Daily Star and Bhorer Kagoj were also charged for publication of the United News of Bangladesh (UNB) report.

"The reporter had no intention to belittle the court, rather the intention to protect practice of the court... We do not find any elements of contempt of court," observed Justice MA Matin and Justice Shamim Hossain in their order rejecting the reference.

Magistrate Khandker Fatema Begum, following the report published on September 29 last year herself initiated a case and forwarded to the High Court for drawing contempt proceedings against Faruk Quazi, senior reporter of UNB, saying the report is a punishable offence under the Contempt of Court Act 1926.

Quazi had reported that lawyers, court officials and litigants at a metropolitan court were surprised when magistrate Khandker Fatema Begum stood up and saluted Minister for Housing and Public Works Mirza Abbas as he appeared there as plaintiff of a defamation case on

BNP MPs

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The bill, placed in parliament on April 28 after some changes, says the government will appoint its officials to the local government bodies after expiry of their tenures and they will continue in office until new bodies are installed through polls.

At yesterday's meeting, Chief Whip Khandakar Delwar Hossain said Article 59 of the constitution did not allow any unselected person to hold any local government position.

"I don't agree with the proposed provision as it's not consistent with the constitution. It'll not be wise to send bureaucrats to local governments," meeting sources quoted him as saying.

Ziaur Rahman Khan, another lawmaker of the key ruling party BNP, expressed the same view.

"We should not appoint bureaucrats to local government bodies for a single day. We should find out another way to break the logjam that blocks timely elections to the bodies."

The chief whip also opposed the proposed proportionate distribution of reserved women seats among political parties with representation in parliament.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, who placed the bill in Jatiya Sangsad, did not make any comment at the meeting.

Committee Chairman Khandakar Mahbud Uddin Ahmed presided over the meeting held at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

3 PCJSS men

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Ataur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, said they had heard the incident but none lodged any case. However, an armed forces team visited the village, he added.

5 Israelis die

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Israel Radio said a car belonging to CNN television had prevented further bloodshed by blocking the road after shooting broke out. There was no immediate comment from CNN.

The militant Islamic Jihad and Popular Resistance Committees, an umbrella group, claimed responsibility for the "heroic" attack in a call to the news agency.

Sultana Panni

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"This is a heinous offence. So, I find it logical to award capital punishment to all the accused," remarked the judge in his observation.

Sonia Khan Panni, daughter of the victim, and her husband Tondrop (who uses one name), a German national, were present in the court. She burst into tears on hearing the verdict and said she was satisfied with the verdict.

Earlier, the prosecution and the defence completed their arguments and tribunal recorded statements of 26 out of 33 prosecution witnesses. The trial of the case was complete in 133 working days.

Sultana, 70, was strangled by her domestic help and their two friends at her Dhanmondi residence in May 19 last year. They also took away Tk 82,000 and gold ornaments said to be worth about Tk 10 lakh.

Sonia filed a murder case with Dhanmondi Police Station the same day without naming any suspects.

Police arrested the accused and the Detective Branch (DB) pressed charges against the four on July 16, showing 26 people as prosecution witnesses. The court framed charges against them on September 20 last year.

All the four gave confessional statements to metropolitan magistrates on different dates during the investigation of the case.

Special public prosecutors Abdul Latif Talukder and Mahbud Ahmed appeared for the state while advocates AKM Akhter Hossain, MA Yusuf and Shafiqur Rahman defended the accused.

More deadlines

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League, the labour front of Awami

League. She said: "If this oppressive government remains in power, peace will remain a far cry. People want rule of law, not terrorism. They no longer want to bear with abuse of power."

On the closure of the Adamjee Jute Mills, the opposition leader said the government turned 35,000 labourers of the mills jobless and blocked the way of livelihood for more than one crore people, including jute farmers.

"During the last two and half years' misrule, this government made four lakh labourers of more than 50 industries jobless while 5 lakh women garments workers as 1,200 garment factories were shut down," she said.

"You cannot provide food and job for the poor labourers, why cut their jobs?" she asked.

The former prime minister mentioned a number of development initiatives, which were taken up by her previous Awami League government.

She said: "The BNP-Jamaat alliance government has totally failed to ensure good governance in the country. They made hattrick in corruption... they secured number one position in torture on journalists, repression on women and children, and violation of human rights."

Hasina alleged that Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and her elder son established a reign of terror across the country, controlling terrorism from "Hawa Bhaban" as they had "done before coming to power by blasting bombs in Udichi function, Ramna Batamul, CPB meeting at Paltan and in

Labour welfare

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Once the foundation is established, workers of the government and non-government sectors would not have to look to the government or the owners for help in their need, she said.

Speaking as chief guest at the function, organised by the labour ministry, the prime minister urged the workers to maintain discipline and work with dedication, honesty and sincerity for increasing production.

She reminded them that development and production in Bangladesh were still labour-oriented and in most of the places, machines were yet to take the place of a person.

"Once again I greet these people behind the machines whose sweat has kept the wheels of development, production and progress moving," Khaleda said.

Referring to women's contribution, she said national development in real sense is not possible by ignoring their rights or by discriminating them.

She asked all concerned to evaluate the contributions of women in the family, field, factory or office with respect.

The prime minister said the government has established technical training centres in every old district for skill-development of the labours. Separate training centres

Donors want search

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criticised the governments' "closed-door practices in policy development, legislative drafting and public decision-making and a culture of secrecy in public administration."

Presenting the report to newsmen at the ADB Bangladesh Resident Mission, Shibuichi said, "Law and order is another of our main concerns. Certainly, it has not improved yet."

On this issue, the report observes, "The government has adopted several measures to improve the law-and-order situation, but progress and effects to date are limited. An increasing level of criminal activities including killings was reported across the country."

The quarterly update says corruption, lack of good governance, poor infrastructure and other negative factors are hindering Bangladesh from achieving a much higher economic growth in keeping with its potentials.

"We have concerns over governance issues and poor infrastructure of this country... We suggest that not only the government, but all people concerned should concentrate on these issues," Shibuichi said.

The report maintains that the political situation in Bangladesh is too volatile for a sound economic health. "The formation of a new political party by the immediate past president was marked by tensions. Meanwhile, two members of parliament belonging to the BNP-led alliance resigned and joined the new political party. Frequency of hartals and violence has increased in recent months. Frequent hartals inhibit the country in realising its true economic potentials."

The update also incorporates the principal findings of the Country Governance Assessment for Bangladesh conducted by the bank. According to the study, the main governance issues needing immediate attention are corruption, impunity [of the corrupt], bureaucratic resistance to reform, excessive centrali-

Narayanganj AL party office."

Referring to the arrest of three Jubo Mohila League workers on April 29 in Dhaka, she accused the government of torturing the activists of her party's female youth wing by using hot water and electric shock. "Such torture on women workers was never seen in the country's history," she said.

"We express our hatred towards Khaleda Zia, as she being a woman, is ordering such torture," Hasina said. "Is it a sign of democracy? Is any democracy there in the country?" she asked.

Hasina said Jamaat-e-Islami, a coalition partner of the BNP-led alliance government, do politics in the name of Islam, "but neither Islam, nor the power is safe in their hands."

She also accused Jamaat of conducting terrorist activities in the guise of various organisations in different parts of the country.

Chaired by Sramik League President Ahsanullah Master MP, the rally was also addressed by AL leaders Abdul Jalil MP, Motia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim MP, Dr Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir, Obaidul Kader, Akhteruzzaman, Abdur Rahman, Prof Nazma Rahman, Habibur Rahman Siraj, Dr Selina Akhter Ivy and Ajay Kar Khokan.

KM Shafiqullah, Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shaheed MP, KM Jahangir Hussein MP, Noor-e-Alam Chowdhury Liton MP, Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, Dewan Shafiq Arefin Tutul, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, AHM Masud Dulal and Monayer Munna were present.

for women were being set up in the divisional towns to groom skilled manpower.

"We believe that the wheels of production and development cannot be kept running without ensuring the interests and welfare of the directly involved toiling labours," she said.

She mentioned that the current labour policy was drawn up during the period of Ziaur Rahman in 1980 while in the 1992 stint of BNP, steps were taken to make the labour laws time-befitting in the light of the ILO Convention.

The alliance government has taken steps to finalise the labour laws, Khaleda said, hoping to see its application very soon.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Amanullah Aman, ILO representative in Dhaka Gopal Bhattacharya, Bangladesh Employers' Federation M Anisuddowah, Jatiyatatabadi Sramik Dal General Secretary M Zafrul Hasan Khan and Secretary In-charge of the labour ministry Ali Imam Majumdar also addressed the function.

Ministers, MPs, chiefs of the three services, diplomats, labour leaders and senior government officials were present.

The function ended with a musical programme.

Barisal city Jubo

Dal secy, five others wounded

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Masked gunmen critically wounded the Jatiyatatabadi Jubo Dal's Barisal city unit secretary and Barisal City Corporation (BCC) commissioner and five others in a pre-dawn ambush yesterday.

Mahbub Alam Mehdi, secretary of the ruling BNP's student wing and commissioner of ward No. 14 of BCC, his four associates and another local youth came under bomb, gun and machete attack a few yards off Mehdi's house.

Police arrested Sohnel and Sujon, two activists of main opposition Awami League's (AL) student front Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and sons of a Barisal district AL leader yesterday morning. Local people took up a procession in protest at the attack.

The victims and police sources said Mehdi and four other Jubo Dal adherents were returning home from the local ward commissioner's office at the Bangla Bazar in the early hours. When they were some yards from his house, a gang of about 20 assailants ambushed them near the Arshad Ali Contractor lane. The attackers blasted bombs and fired gun shots on the victims.

Mehdi took a bullet in the right hand but managed to get into the house, prompting the gunman to fire shots into the house. Humayun Kabir, 32, assistant secretary of the district Jubo Dal, received bullet injuries in the head and chest and Sabuj, 30, a Jubo Dal activist, received a bullet in his leg and was hit in the abdomen and left hand by splinters. The other two Jubo Dal activists, Masud, 28, and Moin, 17, received bullet injuries in leg. The miscreants also chopped Abir, 20, a local resident, when he came out of his house hearing the gunfire and blasts.

All the injured were admitted to Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital, but Mehdi was taken back home to be treated under private arrangement for security reasons. The condition of others was said to be critical. Police have been deployed at Mehdi's house.

Mehdi's brother and former city corporation commissioner Shah Alam Khalifa filed a case with Kotwali Police Station accusing 14.

Barisal city Mayor and district BNP President Majibur Rahman Sarwar visited Mehdi who denied to comment on the cause of attack or the identity of the assailants.

Five killed in road accident

UNB, Dhaka

Five people were killed and 50 others were injured as a speeding bus careered off the road into a ditch in Baghatia in Kalihati upazila Saturday night.

Police and witnesses said the accident occurred at around 9:00pm when the Tangail-bound bus from Mymensingh took the under-construction Baghatia bridge route instead of a bypass.

Three passengers of the bus died on the spot and two others died at a hospital. Four of the victims were Shahidul Islam, 27, Abdul Quddus, 32, Samir Ali, 28, and Rajon, 28, while the other victim's identity could not be known immediately.

Of the injured, 20 were admitted to Tangail General Hospital, while the rest received first aid.

Eid-e-Miladunnabi

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women in society. She said peace and welfare could be established in today's world by following the Prophet's teachings.

Khaleda said the greatest Prophet has set up a unique example of showing mutual respects, tolerance to others' opinions and remaining stick to the truth and justice.

Muslims across the country will observe the day with various programmes. Milad mahfils, waz mahfils, discussions and special prayers will be held to signify the occasion.

Various religious, socio-cultural organisations and political parties will organise processions, doa mahfils and graveyard visits.

Bangladesh Betar and Bangladesh Television and satellite TV channels will air special programmes.

Bangla Academy will hold a discussion meeting on "The Philosophy of Mohammad (SM): Patience and Tolerance" at the academy's seminar room at 4:30pm.

Central Fulkuri Asar will hold children's rally and prize distribution programme at National Press Club at 10:30am. Education Minister Osman Faruk will attend the function as chief guest.

Mugger killed

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"He was not part of any gang," the 55-year-old woman said.

"Criminals in Jamtola (near Rampura) where we once lived killed my son. It's the result of a conflict," said the woman who declined to be named for security reasons.

Khligaoon police said there is no criminal case against Jamal, born in Sanarpar in Narayanganj.

Quoting the traders, Sub-Inspector of Khligaoon Police Station Abdul Khair said two muggers first went to the market to extort tolls, as they did every month before.

"As traders refused to give them money, they left the market and went back in with three others who were waiting outside," Khair said.

Outrage over Iraq

FROM PAGE 12

Written by Major General Antonio Taguba, the report said evidence included "detailed witness statements and the discovery of extremely graphic photographic evidence."

Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman declined to comment on the article, but said, "We take all reports of detainee abuse seriously and all allegations are thoroughly investigated."

He said that when incidents of abuse came to light earlier this year, the army immediately ordered an investigation, and Sanchez ordered a separate probe to ensure such incidents were not widespread in the military detention system in Iraq.

The deputy commander of the US Army's intelligence force is heading an investigation into interrogation practices at the Iraqi prison, The Washington Post reported in its Sunday edition.

News of the military report came days after photographs showing abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US troops were published and broadcast around the globe.

The photos showed US troops smiling, posing, laughing or giving the thumbs-up sign as naked, male Iraqi prisoners were stacked in a pyramid or positioned to simulate sex acts with one another.

US President George W. Bush said on Friday he was deeply disgusted but only a "few people" were to blame. He defended the conduct of the occupation forces as the White House tried to head off a backlash in Iraq and across the Arab world.

The publication of the graphic pictures of abuse involving British and US troops has thrown into disarray coalition plans to "win the hearts and minds" of the Iraqi people.

Many Arab media sources have reacted with rage to the photos in Western media showing the abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US and British soldiers.

The two key TV news channels in the Middle East, al-Jazeera and al-Arabiya, made the American photos their lead story on Saturday.

"The pictures released by the US CBS news network showing repulsive and immoral practices by US soldiers against Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison have caused a great shock and dismay," al-Jazeera's news announcer said.

"If the photos were a shock to the world public opinion, the shock in Iraq and Baghdad in particular has been much greater," its Baghdad correspondent Al