

Cops back jungle rule in northwest

FROM PAGE 1
exposed with black, randomly assaulting people terming them as Sarbahara men, extorting protection money and forcing men to wear beards and women to put on burka, villagers in the region alleged.

They said they were fearful of the activities of the group and its 'supremo', Azizur Rahman, also known as Bangla Bhai, but Aziz denied all the charges.

The JMBJ, which launched the anti-extremist war in April in the region crawling with the outlawed operatives, has allegedly killed seven people and assaulted hundreds of others who oppose them, terming them as Sarbahara men.

POLICE SUPPORT
Noor Mohammad, divisional inspector general of police (DIG), Rajshahi, told The Daily Star yesterday that Aziz and his men were assisting the law enforcers in tracking down the outlaws.

"We've asked police stations to support them whenever they go to catch outlaws."

He said the vigilantes caught two Sarbahara operatives at Baghmara in Rajshahi a week ago, adding: "After verification and interrogation, we found the pair to be really outlaws."

"You know Sarbahara men have been quite active in the region for many years and it is not possible for

the undermanned and under-equipped police to hunt down them. Aziz is now helping us."

On the allegation that the vigilantes were taking the law into their own hands, he said police would keep a vigil on their excesses.

The DIG was, however, critical of the group's 'over-enthusiasm' in asking people to say their prayers and women to wear burka.

Asked whether any group like the JMBJ could carry out the duty of law-enforcers, he said police could seek help from any member of the public.

State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar last night said he had heard of the group which was providing tips-off to police on outlaw operations.

"We encourage such activities," he said, stressing that nobody would be allowed to take law into their own hands.

Babar said he had no knowledge of Aziz before he read some press reports on the group recently.

He said he tried to contact the DIG of Rajshahi yesterday for further details, but could not contact him. The junior minister promised to look into the matter soon.

UNB adds: Over 800 alleged extremists surrendered to the JMBJ at Rainagar upazila in Naogaon in the last two days, raising the number of outlaws given them up in one week to 2,000.

STRONG FOLLOWING

Aziz with a master's in Bangla from Rajshahi University to his credit launched the organisation on April 1 this year and claims that the group by now commands 3,00,000 activists across the country.

"Our goal is to root out Sarbahara men and corruption from society, seize illegal weapons and establish the ideal of the Rasul," he recently told Hasibur Rahman Bilu, Barga correspondent of The Daily Star.

On the allegations of his group's enforcement of harsh Islamic codes, he said the allegations were part of a conspiracy against the 'popular JMBJ'.

"The allegations of harassing women, disregarding people and extorting protection money are propaganda."

"We will continue until Qaiamat," Rahman said. "We will establish a political party named JMBJ if people want it."

On the JMBJ's sources of income, he said, "People from all levels of society are generously paying us funds, no one is pressurizing for money. If someone happily makes a donation, there's no problem."

Asked about the allegation that JMBJ is working with specified directives from the government, Aziz dismissed the suggestion outright, saying, "I'm neither a government official, nor anyone's agent."

"The police do not protect us, we do not need their help. The police are there to protect the people and journalists."

He said people, including union parishad chairmen and peace-loving leaders and activists of political parties in the pockets of widespread extremist operations, were assisting them.

"Although we do not have a political opponent now, we feel cadres from both the ruling and opposition parties are secretly opposing us because of harm to their interests."

"We will give them an opportunity to correct themselves. If they fail to correct themselves, we'll take a tough line against them," he warned.

Suit filed against Prothom Alo editor, publisher, 4 journo

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A ruling BNP lawmaker yesterday filed a damage suit against the editor, publisher, news editor, chief reporter and two correspondents of daily Prothom Alo and claimed Tk 15 crore as compensation.

Wadud Bhuiyan MP, also chairman of Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board, filed the suit with the Fourth Joint District Judge's Court, Dhaka for publishing a series of news items in the daily from March 9 to March 12.

In the lawsuit, Wadud said the news items titled 'Khagracharite Ek Nabab Godfather' (A new godfather in Khagrachhar) and some other reports defamed his reputation.

The defendants are Editor of the newspaper Mattiur Rahman, Publisher Mahfuz Anam, Sanaullah Lablu, news editor, Provash Amin, chief reporter, Mamun Abdullah, staff reporter of Chittagong bureau, and Azim-Ul-Haque, Khagrachhar district correspondent.

After hearing, Judge Mohammad Salauddin took the suit into cognisance and issued summons upon the defendants to appear before the court on June 2.

Public life

FROM PAGE 1
Dr Kamal also urged all pro-democracy forces, professionals, civil society and conscious people to unite under the NPU to resist oppression, crime and corruption, communalism, and political gambling.

Kutubuddin Ahmed, president of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said politicians should behave in a way so that the economy is not hurt. "Confrontational politics is not desirable. What we need is a peaceful atmosphere. It is not desirable that we become the champion in corruption for consecutive years."

M Syeduzzaman, former finance minister, said the practice to make parliament dysfunctional for years has to be stopped.

Ataus Samad, an eminent journalist, said citizen's security is a major concern now.

Professor Rehman Sobhan, CPD chairman, chaired the dialogue.

Rape in SUST

FROM PAGE 12
alleged accomplice Mamunur Rashid Shanto, ex-general secretary of the SUST unit of JCD (Jatiyatadab Chhatra Dal).

During a rally in the afternoon, the teachers also demanded punishment to a group of JCD cadres for attacking students, teachers and photojournalists on April 26 during a protest against the rape.

The SUST Teachers' Association (SUSTTA) earlier issued a 10-day ultimatum to the authorities to accept their demands.

Chaired by SUSTTA Acting President Dr Rashed Talukder, the rally was addressed among others by its General Secretary Zahir Uddin Ahmed, former president Dr Akhtarul Islam and former general secretary Dr Kabir Hossain.

Garment units

FROM PAGE 1
of fire and other mishaps in the past, panicky workers did not use those and rushed to the staircase together, resulting in deaths and injuries in stampede.

Over the last 14 years, around 300 workers were killed and about 1500 injured in 35 accidents in garment factories in the capital, including the victims of the latest incident on Monday, according to newspaper reports.

Garment workers' leaders however alleged most of the factories lack adequate safety measures and other essential facilities for them. They blamed the government and the factory owners for this situation.

"We have had sittings with the government and garment factory owners. They repeatedly assured us of meeting our demands for safety measures and other facilities. But most of the assurances did not materialise," said Shahida Sarkar, a leader of National Garments Workers Federation.

But Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) President Anisul Huq said garment factories have met the requirements of law to run their business. They have also installed safety measures including emergency exit and fire extinguishers.

"Accident is always unexpected. Nobody wants it. But we try to compensate the workers for that. For every case of accidental death, we provide Tk 1 lakh to the family concerned," Huq said.

The injured workers get expenses for treatment in most cases but no compensation, he mentioned.

Sources however alleged many factories in the capital operate in a

dangerous way with defective electric wire, switchboard and electric instruments. A number of factories in Moghbazar, Mallbagh and Elephant Road areas are located in alleyways, where fire service vehicles cannot enter.

According to an estimate of the BGMEA, there are about 3600 garment factories across the country, of which nearly 2600 are in the capital and in its suburbs.

Meanwhile, different organisations yesterday demanded of the government to go for legal action against the owners of factories which lacked safety measures that led to deaths and injuries to workers on Monday.

They held street rallies and demonstrations to press their demand.

The organisations included Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, National Garments Sramik Federation, Samajtantrik Sramik Federation, Bangladesh Sangjukt Garments Sramik Federation, Nari Jote and Karmajibi Nari.

Delhi offers

FROM PAGE 1
India, he said, persisted with peace efforts with Pakistan despite some initial setbacks and insisted that Islamabad should desist from encouraging terrorism in India.

"Now there is peace instead of war. We recently watched cricket matches between the two countries and this was good," he added.

Asserting India's commitment to having peace with its neighbours, Vajpayee said, "You can change your friends but not your neighbours. If your neighbour is bad, you cannot shift your house elsewhere."

Vajpayee casts vote

FROM PAGE 12
policemen and three civilians.

One person died when rival groups in Bihar clashed while stray incidents of violence were also reported from Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan.

However, the fourth of five rounds, was largely peaceful as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) struggled to win a majority in the 545-seat lower house.

"We should get 272 seats very comfortably. I am confident about that," said the 79-year-old premier.

His close aide Pramod Mahajan predicted Vajpayee would defeat challenger Ram Jethmalani, a left-leaning lawyer who was part of the premier's peace bid in Kashmir, by a wider margin than in the last election in 1999 when the premier defeated his closest rival by 118,000 votes.

But while surveys show a comfortable lead for Vajpayee in Lucknow, exit polls from the first three rounds of voting have shown the main opposition Congress party narrowing the gap.

"I see no difficulties... because I don't know how they are making such predictions," Vajpayee said.

The prime minister called the election early, hoping a bumper harvest and peace moves with Pakistan would win his coalition a new five-year term.

"Now cricket is being played, not war," Vajpayee said in a speech Tuesday, referring to the government allowing the national cricket team to

play a full tour in Pakistan for the first time in 14 years.

But projections based on opinion and exit polls in the first phases of voting suggest no bloc would win outright control of parliament.

If his National Democratic Alliance does not win enough seats to form a majority government it would have to draw more small parties into the coalition, making it less stable.

"I am not nervous" about exit polls, Vajpayee told reporters before voting. He displayed the ink on his finger that proved he had voted and flashed a V for victory sign.

The opposition objects to the pro-Hindu agenda of Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party and argues that the government's drive to boost prosperity has been limited to cities.

PM urges

FROM PAGE 1
religious tolerance is also appreciated by foreigners," the prime minister told the delegation.

Khaleda said her party and the government are equally respectful to all religions of the country and observed that the religious harmony in Bangladesh is intact.

She said people of all faiths perform and celebrate their religious activities and festivals freely and enthusiastically, and the government extends all possible cooperation in celebrating their festivals in a free and congenial atmosphere.

Pak foreign secy

FROM PAGE 1
Secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury after holding official talks at the Foreign Ministry yesterday.

Chowdhury told reporters that a list of Bangladeshi export products was handed over to Khokar for "favorable concession" from Pakistan.

Dhaka also requested Islamabad to grant duty-free access of its jute-based products, alongside Bangladesh tea and jute to Pakistan to mend the trade imbalance against Bangladesh.

Pakistan already offered duty-free import of 10 million kilograms of Bangladesh tea and jute following a meeting between Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf in Dhaka in 2002.

Khokar said both sides agreed to ask their commerce ministries to expedite the process of current FTA (Free Trade Agreement) negotiations between the two countries and that Pakistan would also encourage its businessmen to invest in Bangladesh to take advantage of a lucrative investment climate.

He also mentioned the establishment of a joint business council following Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President Abdul Awal Minto's recent visit to Pakistan.

Khokar said the two secretaries discussed the thorny issue of reparating 2.5 lakh stranded Pakistanis and agreed to continue talks until a solution is reached to the "complex" problem.

Referring to President Musharraf's offer of full scholarship for 75 Bangladeshi students to pursue higher studies in Pakistan, Chowdhury said the first batch would be in Pakistan at the start of next academic year.

On regional and international issues, the two foreign secretaries discussed the follow-up to the 12th Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit held in Islamabad in January early this year. They also discussed the situation in Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Cyprus.

Chowdhury said Saarc foreign ministers would meet in Islamabad in July to monitor the progress in activities since the 12th Saarc summit.

Form independent anti-corruption commission: B Chy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Convener of National Committee of Bikalpa Dhara (NCBD), AQM Badruddozza Chowdhury has asked the government to form an independent anti-corruption commission through amendment of the anti-corruption law.

"The government must amend the anti-corruption law and declare a selective body for an independent anti-corruption commission. They can form the independent commission within two months if they work to that end," said Badruddozza while addressing a joining ceremony of 100 new members at KC Memorial City yesterday.

"The donor countries are also pressing the government with the same demand," he said, adding, "You've already heard allegations of embezzling thousands of crores taka by ministers, their family members and the people of ruling clique."

50 students

FROM PAGE 1
injuries. They are Diba and Nurunnahar Doly of Eden college, and Sajal, Atiar, Golam Mostafa, Rakib, Kabir, Probar Mitra and Mahmudul Hasan Shohid of Dhaka College. The other injured students were admitted to local clinics.

"The NU employees attacked us all of a sudden. Some of the female students including myself fell on the ground and some fainted during the attack. My friends rescued me as the attackers pelted us with bricks-bats," said Nurunnahar Doly while talking to newsmen at the DMCH.

Gazipur police arrested five students from the scene.

Over 800 students of 2nd-year (honours) from Dhaka College, Eden College, Titumir College, Mirpur Bangla College, Jagannath College, Bhalwal College and Tongi College went to the NU campus at Gazipur at about 12 noon to press home their demands.

The demands include reforming the NU syllabus, allowing teachers of NU-affiliated colleges to prepare question papers, preparing an NU calendar, holding exams during a specific time period and allowing students to retake exams only for the subjects failed.

NU Vice-Chancellor Prof Aftab Ahmed said the clash began after some unruly students damaged windowpanes of the building where he was holding a meeting with student representatives on their five-point demand.

He claimed the agitating students kidnapped four NU officials and took them to Dhaka College and later released three of them.

He said some 13 NU officials and employees were also wounded and several vehicles damaged during the clash.

Tension was running high at the NU-affiliated colleges where students threatened to go for a greater movement to force the VC to resign unless their demands are met.

On the other hand, the VC said the standard of education will suffer greatly if the authorities give in to these demands.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal and its labour wing Samajtantrik Sramik Front yesterday strongly condemned the attack on the students and demanded punishment to the attackers.

BDF meet

FROM PAGE 1
mentation of a Supreme Court directive for separation of the judiciary from the executive and urged the government to move quickly on the issue.

The note to be discussed at the three-day meeting beginning in Dhaka on Saturday touches upon many other non-economic burning issues like corruption, law and order, institution of a Judicial Service Commission and an independent anti-corruption commission, mishandling of NGOs, investment and regulatory climate and any issues hindering Bangladesh's development.

The donors feel there is a need to end the tradition of opposition boycotting parliament and to 'ensure application of rules of procedure to allow opposition to voice views and to represent citizens concerns'.

They observe improving human security is an urgent priority of the government given the regular reports of violence and insecurity. There has been a surge of politically motivated violence in the recent months, the donors noted.

"Laws and practices inconsistent with international human rights treaties signed by Bangladesh should be revoked and institutions to promote the protection of human rights established," the note says.

The development partners expect the government to update them on the establishment of a National Human Rights Commission and appointment of an Ombudsman.

The government should guarantee the protection of rights and human security of all sections of society, including minority, ethnic and religious groups, the note says.

Decentralisation and developing local government institutions will be key to improving accountability of public service delivery and the donors are keen to see the government's detailed plan for decentralisation, it added.

The note terms the enactment of a law for forming an independent anti-corruption commission a positive step. But it says donors now welcome more details on strategy, sequencing and timing of reforms to ensure that this body becomes operational with the shortest possible delay and that it is independent and effective.

Angry Iraqis ask

FROM PAGE 12
December 2002.

Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said "any American" felt apologetic for abuses of Iraqi prisoners by US soldiers, but stopped short of offering a direct apology himself.

"Abu Ghraib, witness of American savagery," said one banner. "US Army go home. Your families are waiting for you -- this country is for Iraqis," said another carried by the protesters.

Fighting flared again between Sadr's militiamen, the Mehdi Army, and coalition troops who raided the militia's offices in two mainly Shia Muslim towns south of Baghdad.

FRESH CLASHES

At least 16 Iraqis and a coalition soldier were killed in the clashes, according to hospital sources and officials.

Coalition forces seized Sadr's main office in the southern city of Diwaniya, 180 kilometres from Baghdad, and confiscated a cache of arms.

Nine militiamen were killed in clashes there and several others injured, according to a spokesman for the cleric. Five civilians were also killed in the fighting around the office. Hospital sources said violence also ripped the Shiite shrine city of Karbala, where Polish troops took over several buildings occupied by the Mehdi Army. At least three people were killed, including a coalition soldier, coalition and hospital sources said.

Polish forces, which command the force in Karbala, started distributing leaflets late Tuesday warning they would conduct nightly patrols to disarm Sadr's followers.

A US base near the Shia holy city of Najaf, where Sadr has dug in with thousands of armed followers, came under fresh mortar attack early yesterday morning but there were no reports of casualties, officials said.

At least 20 people have been killed in fighting between coalition troops and Sadr's followers since Monday, after the cleric vowed to lead his men to "martyrdom".

"We want you to be more vigilant and more disciplined and, God willing, I'm leading you to martyrdom," Sadr told thousands of followers in a mosque near Najaf, according to video film footage distributed by his office.

CUSTODIAL DEATHS

Two Iraqi prisoners were murdered by Americans and 23 other deaths are being investigated in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US revealed on Tuesday as the Bush administration tried to contain growing outrage over the abuse of Iraqi detainees.

Photographs showing Iraqi

prisoners stripped of their clothes and being humiliated and abused have badly damaged US prestige and credibility, especially in the Arab world.

"The actions of the soldiers in those photographs are totally unacceptable and un-American," Rumsfeld said. "Any who engaged in such action let down their comrades who serve honourably each day and they let down their country."

Army officials said the military had investigated the deaths of 25 prisoners held by American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan and determined that an Army soldier and a CIA contractor each murdered a prisoner. Most of the deaths occurred in Iraq.

N'ganj poultry

FROM PAGE 12
long bargain, they agreed to release the poultry trader and his son for Tk 30,000.

They freed Yusuf and Musa, residents of Jeudhara area in town, at Narayanganj No. 2 railway gate at 10:30pm only after Ahmed paid them the money.

The poultry trader identified five kidnappers as Zaman, Kalam, Selim, Ziaul and Humayun and suspected they are residents of Nayyanganar area under Bandar Police Station. However, police failed to nab any of the abductors till 6:00 in the evening.

In another incident at Siddhirganj, robbers looted 58 tola of gold ornaments yesterday, but abandoned the booty as locals and traders chased them.

Our Narayanganj correspondent adds, two armed youths took away the jewellery at gunpoint from Zaman Jewellers at Saleha Super Market when the owner of the shop was arranging those at 9:30am.

Zaman, owner of the shop, raised a cry for help as the duo got on their motorcycle to flee.

Locals and other traders chased the robbers hearing Zaman's alarm. They fled the area leaving behind their bike and the looted ornaments.

JCD leader

FROM PAGE 1
JCD leader demanding money had threatened his family members with death.

Officer-in-charge of Nabinagar Police Station said Farid was an identified extortionist and involved in a number of cases of repression on women.

Protesting the killing, JCD activists ransacked eight shops at Nabinagar Bazaar yesterday. They demanded punishment to those involved in the killing of Farid.

Government yet to build

FROM PAGE 1
office and cancel Proshika's registration. More than 10,000 staff and 1.25 crore beneficiaries will be affected in the event of cancellation of the registration.

Many see Sunda's filing of the case as the beginning of the stringent measures the government has been threatening against Proshika since coming to office in October 2001. The BNP-led coalition government has been accusing the NGO of aiding main opposition Awami League in its attempts to overthrow a little-over-two-and-half-an-year-old Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's administration.

On April 20 and May 2, police raided the Proshika headquarters in Mirpur and sources said the government has ordered more police raids on the central and regional Proshika offices across the country to gather evidences against the organisation.

Proshika has 200 Area Development Centres (ADCs) covering 257 thanas of 60 districts across the country.

"We are looking for evidences that Proshika had distributed the blueprint to all branches, but we haven't found anything as yet," admits Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Pallabi Police Station Nurul Amin, adding the raids will continue until they stumble into the evidences.

"We have seized some official documents but not found any 'anti-government discussion papers'," he told The Daily Star.

A Proshika official said 10 policemen stormed into Pallabi Thana ADC swearing at Proshika officials on Sunday. Police showed them a paper containing anti-government messages and claimed that according to their intelligence, a similar note was sent to Proshika's Pallabi ADC from its head office. Police then asked the Proshika officials to show them their copies of the paper.

Proshika officials said they knew nothing of such papers, but police searched the office computers, took printouts of office documents and finally made a seizure list. The last item mentioned on the seizure list was 'anti-government discussion paper-2 pages'.

A Proshika official of the ADC told The Daily Star that police did not give them any copy of the seizure list. "Police found no anti-government messages in our office. They themselves brought the so-called 'anti-government discussion paper-2 pages' and claimed to have found it here," the Proshika official added.

He said police forced five Proshika officials to sign on a paper that read, "Although it was not mentioned in their employment contract, they have to make a regular donation to Oikyaabaddha Nagorik Andolon (ONA, where Qazi Farouq serves as member secretary)".

The statement also included a commitment by the officials that they will testify as and when required, he said. But OC Nurul Amin said he knew nothing about police's taking signatures of Proshika officials by

force. "No fabrication was made nor any false information included during the preparation of seizure list," he claimed.

"Proshika designed a blueprint to accelerate anti-government movement that included sticking posters, writing songs and distributing leaflets with anti-government slogans," the OC also claimed.

Qazi Faruque, however, has denied outright any involvement with the Awami League to topple the government by April 30 and also denied plotting against the government.

Nasima Akhtar Lovely, ADC zonal co-ordinator for Mirpur, Kafrul and Pallabi, told The Daily Star she has been receiving threats on the phone for continuing with her job and has filed a general diary with Mirpur Police Station.

Meanwhile, arrests of some Proshika officials, police raids on its offices and relentless political threats have frightened its 10,000 employees across the country. Scores of Proshika officials complained that staff are fearful of arrest and harassment while going to office, which has hit Proshika operations hard.

Sources said at least 100 of over 600 employees of Proshika's head office are not coming to the office since the April 20 raid and arrests of five officials including its cultural wing Deputy Director Abdur Rab. They fear being caught by police and coerced into giving 'confessional' statements against their organisation's anti-government involvement, sources said.

Police allegedly forced Rab to give a confessional statement before a magistrate, which Rab later retracted. Police also picked up Dhaka city President of ONA Harunur Rashid and allegedly forced him to state on camera that Proshika played an anti-government role. After television channels telecast the video clip, Harun sent another statement from a hideout later saying that police coerced him into making such a statement.