

Mass arrests prompt AL

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government by arresting more than 15,000 people.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina will make her first appearance at a public rally after the August 21 carnage to announce fresh programmes from the grand rally.

"We have no way but to enforce hartal as we cannot hold peaceful programmes such as rallies and processions. The government is forcing us to enforce hartal," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told a press conference yesterday.

Jalil threatened to paralyse the country by enforcing indefinite general strikes if the government does not immediately stop whole-sale arrests of opposition activists.

Hasina, also the AL president who is now in Singapore for treatment of her hearing problem, may return on Wednesday. "We are in constant touch with the party chief and she is being informed of the latest development here," a senior AL leader said, seeking anonymity.

An AL-enforced hartal, meanwhile, was enforced in six districts of greater Mymensingh and Tangail yesterday in protest against the arrest of its leaders and workers after a rally at Mymensingh circuit house ground on September 24.

AL sources said the police have been searching the houses and possible locations of the activists of AL and its front organisations to nab them. The political activists are being implicated in false cases after arrest, they alleged.

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar refuted the allegation and told the BBC Bangla Service last night that the ongoing drive was a regular anticrime drive.

The AL general secretary however said the government being nervous of the huge participation in the September 22 no-confidence human chain from Gazipur to Narayanganj has launched the mass-arrest drive to create panic among the opposition adherents.

Double trouble

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(CMM), Dhaka yesterday sent 225 of the 316 people hauled up in the capital on Saturday to Dhaka Central Jail and released 91 others after fining them.

The hearing on the bail petitions for the 225 arrestees sent to jail will be held today or tomorrow. Of them, 34 were shown arrested under Section 54 (for suspicious movement) of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) and 167 under Sections 74 and 86 of the DMP Ordinance.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil claimed, since the crack down began, police arrested over 3,000 AL leaders and activists across the country to foil the opposition's string of anti-government programmes, particularly the October 3 grand rally.

The hartal AL enforced yesterday in six districts of greater Mymensingh protesting the mass arrest was observed peacefully.

However, State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar told the BBC Bangla Service last night the drive is a part of the regular anti-crime activity, not one of a mass arrest.

A large crowd of poor people was seen in front of and around the Dhaka CMM Court Hajat (custody) yesterday mornning with water containers and dried food in hand. Most of them claimed their relatives under arrest are innocent.

They also alleged police falsely implicated their kin in crimes like extortion, robbery, theft and even bomb explosions, though they are not named in the first information reports (FIRs) of cases concerned.

Sources confirmed that 103 people were arrested on various charges including extortion, theft, robbery and involvement in bomb explosions, though they were not mentioned in the FIRs.

During a visit to the Dhaka CMM Court premises yesterday The Daily Star found a group of brokers taking money from some poor people to manage bails for their arrested relatives. But the courts are rarely granting bails to people arrested in the ongoing drive.

Iqbal Hossain alleged police asked

The opposition camp will con-clude its three-week simultaneous agitation programmes on October 3 by holding separate rallies in Dhaka and elsewhere.

The Workers Party of Bangladesh will hold a rally at Hadis Park in Khulna the same day, while the Communist Party of Bangladesh holds mass rallies in Dhaka and district headquar-ters on September 29 to strengthen the ongoing movement.

AL Presidium Member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim told The Daily Star yesterday, "We are not allowed to speak in parliament as the speaker is biased to the ruling coalition. We are not allowed to even hold peaceful programmes on the streets."

He said such a move by the government in its bid to quell the opposition would compel the oppo-sition parties to take a hardline.

The central leaders of the main opposition in 15 separate teams are now in a four-day tour across the country to mobilise people to join the October 3 rally. The front organisa-tions of AL are also taking prepara-tions to make the rally a success.

On Saturday, the left-leaning 11-Party Alliance in a statement labelled the mass arrests as a sign of government's fail and said such police harassment would not stop mass movement against the gov-ernment's misrule.

"The mass movement will be toughened in the coming days to force this failed government to quit," JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu told The Daily Star yesterday.

Jubo Sangram Parishad, an alliance of seven youth organisa-tions backed by the opposition parties, will stage a grand rally in Chittagong on October 6. Two such rallies will be organised in Khulna and Rajshahi on October 9 and 12.

The programmes were announced yesterday from a joint rally held at Muktangan in Dhaka with Jubo League Chairman Jahangir Kabir Nanok in the chair.

money from him for release of his brother Jahangir Alam whom police arrested on his way home near Mohakhali TV Gate from his work place, a welding shop in Narayanganj.

"A police of Gulshan Police Station demanded Tk 8,000 in bribe to arrange my brother's release, but being poor we could not give the money," said Iqbal standing near the court Hajat. Police arrested Jahangir as a vagabond under Section 86 of the DMP Ordinance.

"I collected Tk 5,000 by mortgaging some saris to release my son on bail whom Pallabi police arrested on Thursday at Muslim Camp in Mirpur Section 11 and implicated in a bomb case," Munnir Begum, mother of the arrestee, Anwar, 17.

"Anwar is the lone man and bread-winner of my family. He works at a weaving factory at Benarashi Palli in Mirpur," Munnir said in a choked voice.

Shahida Begum, who stood in front of the Hajat with despair written on her face, said police hauled up her hus-band Anisur Rahman, a vegetable shopkeeper of Karwanbazar, at Mohakhali last Saturday when he was returning home and deceitfully impli-cated him in a theft case.

She seemed bewildered at what to do to get her husband out on bail.

Sutrapur Police arrested Abdul Khalek, 25, worker of a furniture shop, at Jatrabari and Sentu, 37, an iron-worker, at Sayedabad, though they did nothing wrong, claimed the victims' mother.

Though Saiful Islam has no political affiliation, Ramna police hauled him up from his Maghbazar house Friday afternoon and showed him arrested for robbery and mugging.

"He is not accused in any case or involved in politics. But police arrested him and implicated in robbery and mugging cases as our brother-in-law is a local AL leader," said Saiful's brother, Shahidul Islam.

HSC result today

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websitewww.educationboard.org.b d, the release added.

The board management has taken a number of security mea-sures to protect the website. Last time, it suffered a collapse because of excessive hits by the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) result seekers, officials said.

Examinees have been asked to collect results from educational institutions at 4:00pm. No results will be available at the education boards, education ministry or news-paper offices, the release added.

For the first time, HSC results can be accessed via 'Push and Pull' Short Message Service (SMS). Net2Cell Technologies, a private firm in conjunction with cellular phone operator AKTEL, has arranged the service.

AKTEL subscribers will be able to know the results by sending SMS to 8472. First, they will need to go to the message option of mobile handset and type the roll number with board code. And then, they will have to send the message to 8472 to get the results.

First three digits of a board's name form the board code, for instance, "dha" for Dhaka Board.

Education Board Computer Centre in a statement yesterday, however, said none of the mobile firms has an agreement with the board to publish HSC results through mobile phone.

"So, there's no guarantee of authenticity of the results through mobile phone," Prof Saheda Obeyed, chairman of Dhaka Board, on behalf of nine education boards, said in the statement.

The board authorities shall not be held responsible for any cheat regarding the results through mobile phones, the release added.

An official of Net2Cell Technologies told The Daily Star, "As the board did not agree, we're doing it on private initiative."

Publication of results via SMS is now commonplace even in the neighbouring countries, but bureau-cratc tangle is holding back use of the cutting-edge technology in Bangladesh, the official added.

Robbers shoot 5 in Fatulla, Dhanmondi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Robbers yesterday in separate incidents shot five people in Dhanmondi and Fatulla in Narayanganj.

Five robbers entered a whole-sale oil shop in Fatulla Bazar at around 12:30pm, shot its manager Selim, 25, and salesman Maruf, 23 and made good with Tk 4 lakh.

Hearing gunshots, locals chased the robbers who opened fire on them, wounding Afzal Hossain Borat, 32, while a stray bullet hit pedestrian Shajib, 30. The robbers also struck Royal Chowdhury by a pistol butt that broke his arm.

However, locals held Rony, 25, Jahangir, 26, and Ashique, 25, beat up and handed them over to police, while two others -- Bapli and Farid - managed to escape.

The bullet-hit are receiving treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

In Dhanmondi, robbers shot Ziaur Rahman Sumon, 30, owner of a cyber cafe, at his house in Hatirpool at around 4:00am.

Eight robbers broke into the first-floor house and made an attempt to bind the residents at gunpoint.

Resisted, they beat up Sumon and shot him in his abdomen. He was admitted to the DMCH in critical condition.

His mother Mosharrafra said, the robbers fled snatching away her gold ornaments and firing gunshots.

Basila

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spells of erosion in the last 42 days and is now posing erosion threat to many more but the government is yet to do anything.

"Plying of vessels causes stronger current in the river that hits its banks and intensifies erosion. We will not allow plying of motorised vessels in the river in our neighbourhood till the government takes effective measures to save us," said Maulana Abu Taher, who was leading a group boarding an engine boat.

People of the area also said unplanned dredging of the river by sand traders changed its course and worsened the situation.

"Every day at least a couple of hundred vessels move through this river as developers carry sand and brick to fill up low-lying lands in Savar area and for construction work," said a local.

As the erosion continues, a pon-toon of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) became vulnerable yesterday. When BIWTA officials came to take away the pon-toon, agitating locals resisted them, witnesses said.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain had earlier directed the BIWTA to remove the illegal brick kiln opposite Basila, which the locals said manly caused the erosion.

Basila people alleged BIWTA officials came once and did some cash, dredging beside the kiln and went away.

At a press conference yesterday, the shipping minister again said legal actions would be taken against the brick kiln owners, who constructed a dyke to protect their kiln that diverted the river channel.

BIWTA Chairman M Reaz H Khondoker said they were unable to remove the brick kiln now due to lack of required dredging machine. But they would be able to do it during the dry season.

On unplanned dredging of the river by sand traders, he said it can allow dredging by private sector only if it helps meet BIWTA's target.

Most of the erosion victims are poor and unable to rebuild their houses, said Siddique Mia, a victim.

35 more villages

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Onrush of waters from the Kabodak and Betrabati rivers inundated a number of villages in Kalaroa, Tala and Sadar upazilas forcing several thousand people to leave their homestead and take shelter in flood-free high places.

Acute scarcity of food and drinking water is prevailing in the affected areas. The government is yet to start relief operation in the areas, locals alleged.

Deara Union Parishad Chairman Anwarul Islam said his union is the worst affected area the upazila and most of the villages have gone under water.

B Chy, Kamal

FROM PAGE 12
spectrum of people.

Badruddoza said: "People fought for democracy and voted several times for a change, but their dreams are yet to be fulfilled."

He also said a sense of insecurity has been prevailing among the people as the government failed to provide security to life.

"A few people and their family members are plundering the country and siphoning wealth out of the country," Badruddoza alleged.

He said opinions would be sought from the people through questionnaires about the tyepe of government they want.

2 PBCP leaders

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Khulna have taken refuge in Jessore in the wake of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) drives. The Rab activity in Jessore is minimal, they added.

The sources said Debu, another top terror of Khulna, has got himself admitted to BCMC College, Jessore and is residing at a mess in front of the college. Police raided the mess but returned empty handed, as Debu fled through a window.

Donors to make flood rehab

FROM PAGE 1
Agriculture and industries are likely to be most adversely affected in the short run. Moreover, the balance of payments position may somewhat deteriorate, which could put pressure on the foreign exchange reserves.

"The overall impact of the floods on economic growth is likely to put pressure both on public expenditure and tax revenues," the joint press briefing observed.

The joint mission did, however, propose a three-phase recovery assistance programme to provide post-flood financial and other assistance.

The mission has done a prelimi-nary assessment report on the flood damage and would finalise it in three to four weeks to make known how much assistance would be there, Wallich said.

The mission examined the impact of the floods on the micro-economy and sectors including housing, transport, water supply and sanitation, education, health, water resources, municipal infra-structure, power, trade and industry, agriculture, fisheries and livestock and microfinance, according to the joint press statement.

When asked about the govern-ment damage estimates of over \$ 6 billion, Wallich said, "The govern-ment did not officially tell us about any damage estimates."

The joint mission developed the findings based on the government data, knowledge of the sector and analysis. The mission held discus-sions with numerous agencies, including the government agencies concerned, UN agencies, develop-ment partners, NGOs, public and private institutions and academics, the press briefing was told.

Wallich said the mission made visits to 10 flood-affected districts to make the damage estimates in line with internationally practised meth-odology.

The mission observed this year's floods are likely to be as devastating as the 1998 floods in many ways.

It recommended a phased assistance programme, taking into account the need for long-term disaster management and the efforts of other development partners.

Phase one focuses on the imme-diate recovery of up to 15 months and it will address urgent rebuilding activities in such critical sectors as roads, water supply and sanitation, education, health, water resources management, municipal infrastruc-

ture, social protection and housing. Phase two has its focus on the mid-term recovery, up to five years, especially in the critical sector, including social and physical infra-structure. This phase may also entail recovery programme for roads, water resources manage-ment and identification and initiation of critical preparatory activities for disaster preparation and response.

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FDI appeal lost

FROM PAGE 1

Going deep into a UN report that mentioned a spectacular FDI growth achieved by Bangladesh in 2003, Wallich said, though the growth is the highest in South Asia, the country remains nearly at the bottom in terms of volume of FDI.

She said in absolute terms the FDI inflow is even lower than Afghanistan and on per capita basis it is the lowest in the region.

"Bangladesh is not a failed country but a fragile one," the WB high official maintained. Because, she said, quality and transparency in public administration is low, infrastructure is lacking, state-owned enterprises are a burden to economy, and higher and technical education are sorely deficient.

"Weak property rights and quality of justice, law and order, and policing make security a daily concern for citizens and businesses. Corruption pervades all aspects of life's daily transactions and both public and private governance fall far short of desired," she went on.

Wallich said for long the substan-dard services and facilities at Chittagong port have been polluting the investment climate, but still there are no visible steps to correct the situation.

Turning to readymade garment (RMG), she said, the sector will face serious challenge in the quota-free regime if it cannot reduce the present delivery time of 90 to 120 days, adding this too long time is needed mainly due to port inefficiency.

On impact of political unrest on FDI and businesses, Wallich said both the ruling and the opposition parties must end the present dys-functional policies so that the country gets a non-political political cul-ture that supports a healthy busi-ness growth.

"The investors cannot help but be discouraged by the quantum leap in violence that seems to have taken place and the impunity with which crimes are committed," the WB country director observed.

Though there is much ado about the post-MFA (multi-fibre arrange-ment) challenge for the RMG sector, the government has cancelled a proposal for central bonded ware-houses in export processing zones, which would help exporters reduce lead time, Wallich said.

"We strongly support creation of central bonded warehouses, and hope that will also get the support of foreign investors," she added.

Wallich also regretted the gov-ernment's decision against using the European Union's relaxed rules of origin offer for the Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation) countries, which, she said, will deprive the RMG exports of availing Generalised System of Preference facilities.

Bangladesh is yet to withdraw restriction on foreign investment in RMG sector outside the export processing zones, which narrows the possibility of a much stronger RMG sector with foreign invest-ment, she noted.

Importers now need 30 days to get yarn from India, as the govern-ment has banned yarn import through land port, through which earlier it took only five days. It raises cost of production, affects the lead-time factor and ultimately reduces competitiveness, the WB country chief said.

On the WB's legal immunity issue, she said, like other United Nations bodies, the bank also enjoys this immunity in its 184 member countries. In a bitter note, she said, "Lack of knowledge about the issue creates such debate here. It's nothing extra-ordinary, nothing additional."

Ficci President Mahbub Jamil, who chaired the meeting, said lack of proper governance, poor law and order, corruption, inadequate infra-structure and contract sanctity are some major areas of concern for potential foreign investors in Bangladesh.

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