

Judicial probe hints

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he termed "a national catastrophe".
"The two major political parties should work only for national interests, brushing aside all differences so that the local and foreign enemies cannot create anarchy in the country," he said. "I have called on civil society to share their opinions with leaders of the two major political parties without waste of time and without hesitation."

"They (two major political parties) have to be convinced that only patriotism can pull this country out of the national catastrophe it is in," he added.

Asked to reveal identity of the perpetrators, he said, "I've made hints in my speech."

When pressed for saying if the foreign enemies that he hinted in his speech were behind the attack, he refused to be drawn further on the matter. "All the information is there in my report."

As the journalists told him that the briefing would frustrate the nation that is eagerly waiting to know the identity and motive of the perpetrators, Justice Abedin said, "People know well about the commission's jurisdiction and limitations."

The commission made a detailed report about the security arrangements and neglect by the police and security agencies. It said there is no co-ordination among the agencies, according to sources.

It also made 25/30 recommendations to stop a repeat of such incidents. The recommendations include formation of an elite police force to stop smuggling of arms and explosives

through the borders, setting up of a laboratory by the Criminal Investigation Department to quickly examine explosives and evidence after such incidents, a stop to political and religious rallies at undesignated places, and meeting organisers' contacting the police for security.

Justice Abedin suggested the police install several video cameras at some strategic points for filming such public rallies. He recommended that private television channels train up their crew for properly filming such rallies to facilitate identifying the criminals from the footages.

The government formed the commission on August 22 and asked it to submit its report in three weeks. But the commission had the deadline extended for 21 more days.

The commission took statements of 123 people including the injured victims and their doctors, AL leaders and activists present in the rally, explosives experts, journalists and security men.

It sought appointment with Hasina to have her account of the deadly event, but did not have any, as the AL questioned the neutrality of the probe body. The party did not allow it to inspect the sports utility vehicle that carried Hasina to safety immediately after the grenade blasts.

Asked if that hindered the inquiry, Justice Abedin said, "The commission may not have received cooperation from all, which may have somewhat hindered the investigation, but the inquiry is in no way incomplete."

Saarc trade experts

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facility under a free trade agreement (FTA), now being negotiated by the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (Saarc).

Saarc foreign ministers at the 12th summit of the regional forum in Islamabad early this year signed a landmark agreement to establish South Asian Free Trade Area (Safra) for better economic co-operation among the South Asian nations.

"It is not possible for Bangladesh to agree on issues that may cause substantial revenue loss for us," said a commerce ministry official when asked about the negative and positive lists of items prepared for the free trade regime.

About the issue of rules of origin under the deal, he said Bangladesh is in favour of 30 percent local value addition in case of exporting its products to other South Asian markets while India is preferring at least 40 percent value addition.

The Safra will be effective from

January 1, 2006 with greater economic integration of Saarc countries -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and India -- a market of about 150 crore people.

Bangladesh has substantial trade deficit with almost all the Saarc countries including India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bhutan.

India exported goods worth US\$1.1 billion in 2001-02 financial year to Bangladesh while imported products amounting to only \$50 million from the country. The trade deficit stood at \$590 million in the first six months of FY03.

Bangladesh imported goods worth US\$68.68 million from Pakistan in 2002-03 while its exports amounted to \$31.5 million showing a trade deficit of \$38.4 million.

Imports from Sri Lanka in 2002-03 totalled \$8 million as against exports worth \$3.75 million, according to Export Promotion Bureau

Concern over atrocities by religious fanatics

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

South Asian People's Union against Fundamentalism and Communalism and Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmla Committee in a joint statement yesterday expressed concern over what they said were growing atrocities by the religious fanatics under the patronage of the government.

Earlier on August 27, strong resistance by pro-liberation war forces prevented the fanatic organisations from taking control of the Ahmadiyya Complex in Bakshibazar, but the religious bigots with support of the local administration succeeded in occupying Ahmadiyya mosques in Chittagong, Patakhali and Khulna, said the statement.

The statement also expressed worries over anti-Ahmadiyya outfit Khatme Nobuwa's plans to occupy Ahmadiyya Mosque in Narayanganj on October 8.

Repression on the religious minorities has grown to huge proportions since the alliance government came in power, the statement said. Various human rights organisations too in their reports noted the increased human rights violations in the country, the statement added.

Besides, the statement deplored the growing number of deaths under police custody and mass arrests.

The policy makers of the present government must be brought to justice in national and international courts for political persecution to resist the opposition parties, it said.

The signatories to the statement urged all pro-liberation war social, political and cultural organisations to unite against the misuse of the present government.

Professor Kabir Chowdhury, women activist Hena Das, former Justice KM Sobhan, singer Kaïm Sharafi, artist Qaiyum Chowdhury, architect Rafiq Hussain, diplomat Waliur Rahman, film maker Shamim Akhter, novelist Muhammad Zafar Iqbal, freedom fighter Shirin Banu Mitil, social activist Abu Sayeed, among many others, signed the statement.

Nunu Miah alleges BNP MP's hand in 'false case'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Expatriate and Awami League leader Nunu Miah has reiterated that ruling BNP lawmaker M Ilyas Ali falsely implicated him in a case of a blast at Gulshan Centre here that killed an AL leader and hurt 30 others.

At a news conference at Sylhet Press Club yesterday, Nunu Miah expressed his gratitude to AL chief Sheikh Hasina, British legislators Oona King and Janet Ladlu, and British envoy to Bangladesh Anwar Chowdhury for their efforts into his release.

"Though I'm innocent, police picked up me minutes after the blast on August 7, goaded by Ilyas, who is hostile to me," Nunu told reporters. "Ilyas had earlier asked me to join the ruling party, but I turned down his proposal," Nunu claimed.

On the advice of Ilyas, police tortured him physically and mentally at Kotwali Police Station and the office of the superintendent of police, Nunu alleged.

Nunu further alleged police blindfolded and pressed him hard for his confessional statement regarding Mohammad Ibrahim, city AL publicity secretary, who died in the blast. "They gave me electric shock as I refused to give in." He also alleged CID ASP Munshi Atiqur Rahman demanded Tk 5 lakh from him.

"I'll sue the law enforcers for torturing me", said Nunu, who was released on bail on September 25.

Accused of cop

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Communist Party (PBCP).

He was an FIR-listed accused in murder cases of three policemen and two rivals of PBCP (M-L). He claimed responsibility for the five murders through fax messages to local newspapers identifying himself as Tushar, his party (PBCP-J) code name.

According to some eye witnesses, Ripon Jamaccard was shot dead by plainclothes police in a bush at Sirampur village under Rupsha upazila early morning on Thursday. Later, his body was thrown into the canal.

Ripon's wife Mayuri Begum alleged that her husband was killed by the DB police.

Police Super Habibur Rahman, however, said the murder was sequel of intra-party rift.

Ripon became the regional leader of the party replacing Habibul Bashar alias Amit Hassan who was killed in crossfire at Maheswarpasha under Daulatpur Police Station in Khulna city last July, he added.

New law on cards

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certain distance from a river in order to check erosion and prevent encroachments on water bodies," Water Resource Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed said after the first meeting of the committee held yesterday.

According to the draft law, none would be allowed to create any barrier to the natural water flow in rivers or canals for personal interests. The law would empower the authority to remove any encroachment on the water bodies.

It says none would be allowed to erect any permanent structure on water bodies without prior permission from the authority, which would be given the legal power to remove such structures on rivers or riverbanks, canals and in the flood flow zones.

If any landowner erects any structure on his land in the prohibited zone on the riverbanks, legal actions will be taken against him, the draft law says.

For setting up launch terminals,

ghats or any other infrastructure for the interest of the people, the government department concerned will have to seek permission from higher authority through deputy commissioner of the district concerned.

Under the strict provisions of the act, setting up of under-water gas pipelines and installation of telephone cables would require prior permission of the ministry concerned. Dredging of rivers would also need prior approval.

The district administration being informed by any person of the locality about any encroachment would serve notice to the illegal encroachers to remove the structure within seven days at his own expenditure. On default, the administration would take initiative to remove the illegal structures and file criminal cases against the encroachers.

According to the draft law, district administrations would also survey the riverbanks in every two years to observe whether there was any illegal structure.

Basila dwellers

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not come forward to check the erosion, 250-year old Basila, which is the home of more than 20,000 people, will be washed away." They also staged a sit-in in front of the lawmaker's house from 7:30am to 12:00noon.

The lawmaker assured the protesters of a visit to Basila today although he made no commitment to stopping the erosion.

Khandaker Mahubub told The Daily Star yesterday that he would take up the matter with Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain and Water Resources Minister Hafiz Uddin Ahmed.

The lawmaker, however, cited the experts' opinion that it is not possible to stop the erosion unless the water recedes totally.

Since August 13, the diverted course of the river Buriganga devoured 35 houses with more than 56 units of rooms at Basila. It still threatens to wipe out the entire Basila with flood plains on one side and the Buriganga on the other.

The erosion was obvious because of three brick kilns con-

structed illegally on the river, demolition of which Basila residents already demanded. The kiln owners, in the beginning of recent floods, dumped millions of rejected bricks into the river to build a solid dyke to prevent the river from flowing by both sides of their installations.

Between Mohammadpur flood protection embankment and Basila, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) constructed a kilometre long road from east to west over the flood plains, which lacked culverts for flow of water from upstream to Buriganga.

After the first phase of destruction, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) frantically tried to demolish the dyke, which temporarily weakened the river flow. But after recent heavy rainfall, the river flow again went furious devouring many more houses and threatening Basila's very existence.

Outlaw killed in gunbattle

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One pipe gun and three cartridges were recovered from the outlaw before he died, said Mosharef Hossain, officer in charge of Khulna Police Station. Police and Kabir's accomplices exchanged at least 15 rounds of gunshots, he added.

Son of Amjad Ali of Rajapur village under Swarankhola upazila of Bagerhat district, Kabir Hossain was among the terrorists listed by Khulna Metropolitan Police. He was suspected of having links to a number of murders including those of journalist Manik Saha, Havilder Akram, Satkhira-based shrimp trader Abdul Wahab, Batiaghata Union Parishad Chairman Amir Azam Khan, police informer Aslam Shaikh and journalist Humayun Kabir Balu. Besides, he was involved in bomb attacks on police in Khulna city, said Assistant Commissioner of police Anis Ahmed.

ARMS RECOVERY
Khulna police said arms and ammunition recovered from Dumuria upazila of Khulna on Friday night had been dumped by armed cadres of NBCP. They had fled to India after murders of Mirinal and his second-in-command and Gutudia UP Chairman Khan Alamgir Kabir alias Alam.

A team of Dumuria police recovered one small carbine machinegun, one rifle, 17 foreign pistols with 16 silencer pipes, one nine shooter gun, one .22 bore rifle, two six-shooter guns and 114 bullets from Ghengrail Char in Shovna union. They were in a sack packed with a polythene bag.

Superintendent of Khulna police

Habibur Rahman said a thorough search for arms is going on and soon more arms would also be recovered. Joint forces would not spare a cadre of NBCP from arrest, he added.

Deputy Inspector General of Police (Khulna range) Abdul Aziz Sarker described Friday's arms recovery as the biggest achievement of police in recent years in southwestern region of the country. Meanwhile, hundreds of men and women of Dumuria yesterday brought out a procession to celebrate the recovery of arms and ammunition.

In a rally Dumuria sadar UP chairman urged the people to help police recover all the arms left by NBCP cadres.

RAZZAK SLAIN
Abdur Razzak, 40, founder of infamous 'Razzak Bahini' of the Sundarbans and his second-in-command Haidar Ali, 36, were killed in a party feud at around midnight of September 30 at Tetulbaria village under Swarankhola upazila of Bagerhat district, said Swarankhola police.

Razzak and Haider Ali were chopped and shot to death after a dinner party at Kadem Ali's house, police said.

Razzak used to lead a group of 200 cadres who were notorious for robbery, abduction and plundering the forest resources. He surrendered to the police with eight arms in 1999 in presence of former home minister Mohammad Nasim at Swarankhola Pilot High School ground, said Officer in Charge of Swarankhola Police Station Hari Devnath.

Agrani management

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managing director of Southeast Bank Limited before his new assignment.

The CEO also assured the bank staff that no jobs would be axed and told them that the terms of reference that the government gave them do not mandate the private management to privatise the bank.

Bakhtear, however, said branches of the bank that are in the red would be shut down in line with a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed with Bangladesh Bank.

Earlier on the day, the Collective Bargaining Agents (CBA) and the Agrani Bank Officers' Association demonstrated on the premises of the bank's headquarters at Motijheel before the CEO took over. Later, they met the CEO with their four-point demand.

The CBA and association leaders demanded that no jobs can be axed and no loss-making branches closed down. They also asked of the management that the bank cannot be privatised and an inquiry committee be formed to probe the huge defaulted loans of the bank.

They observed that the defaulters were provided with fresh loans through rescheduling of their previous defaulted loans. The new management should expose those who rescheduled the loans through the probe and bring them to justice.

The CEO held a meeting with the top officials of the bank and the leaders of the CBA and the officers' association. The leaders asked him to clarify the private management's

position on their demands.

He told them that the private management has nothing to do with the bank's privatisation and that it depends entirely on the government.

On closure of branches, Bakhtear said each Agrani Bank branch has 14 staff on average and his earlier bank, Southeast Bank Limited, has 20 staff. It means the bank has no excess manpower and there is no question of retrenchment.

He however said the management will keep an eye on the performance of the staff.

The bank will have a participatory management approach in taking new decisions. The management will hold monthly meetings where CBA and officers' association leaders will be invited. The decisions reached at the meetings will be sent to the board of directors for approval and then to the finance ministry for final nod, the CEO said.

On formation of probe body, he told The Daily Star that there is no point digging into the past because unpleasant facts will surface. "We need to look forward," he observed.

The union leaders called off their agitation programme after the meeting with the bank management. The Left Front also demonstrated in front of the bank's head office against the takeover by a private management.

Samir Ahmed (treasury functions), Shahadat Hossain (accounts) and Faruk Uddin (internal audit) joined the bank yesterday.

Azam Reza's bail move turned down

BSS, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday rejected bail petition of Azam Reza, who is now in custody for allegedly murdering his wife Joyontee Reza, a teacher of Scholastica School.

A vacation bench comprising Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain and Justice Mohammad Miftahuddin Chowdhury passed the order after hearing the petition.

Joyontee was found dead in her house at Gulshan. A murder case was lodged in this regard. The case is now pending with the Court of Metropolitan Sessions Judge, Dhaka.

Senior Advocate Abdul Malek appeared before the court on behalf of Azam Reza, while Deputy Attorney General Heli Uddin Mollah and Assistant Attorney General Mohammad Abdul Baset stood for the state.

CPA rebuffs

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The report, "we guess, was done at the behest of some quarters with vested interest in privatisation of Chittagong Port," he added.

At the briefing Nurullah Bahar, a leader of the port's collective bargaining agent (CBA), threatened to sue the Bangladesh chapter of the Berlin-based governance watchdog and demanded unconditional apology from it for what he said was damaging the image of port workers.

"I will definitely go for legal action and file at least two to three cases against the TIB for its derogatory report against my workers," said Bahar, also a leader of the workers' wing of ruling BNP, Jatiyatabadi Srarnik Dal.

The TIB in a stunning revelation Tuesday last said the port and customs officials at Chittagong Port exact about Tk 783 crore from importers and exporters in bribes and tips a year.

The report on a yearlong 'Diagnostic Study: Chittagong Port' conducted from July 2003 to June 2004 also found berthing of a vessel here requires filling of as many as 42 forms, six times that at Malaysia's Penang Port.

But the CPA chief said, "In fact, importers and exporters need to fill but two [for inward and outward shifting of vessel] forms where they are asked to provide 42 information - divided into two groups of 23 and 19 each. The TIB in this case misinterpreted that 42 information as 42 forms."

"The report has many such exaggerations, which have damaged the image of Chittagong Port as well as that of the country," he said.

According to Shahadat, "The design of the vested quarters behind such exaggerations or smear campaign is apparent in the recommendations of the TIB report. They want the port to be handed over to a trustee or privatise it to pave the way for Stevedoring Services America (SSA) or such companies taking it over."

Building on this hypothesis, the CPA chairman said, "Once the economy comes under control, the country is too. And Chittagong Port is the easiest tool to hold sway over the country's economy."

He said some of the blames that the TIB has dumped on the CPA resulted from confusion, for many irregularities or activities including those of the customs, clearing and forwarding agents, stevedores etc do not fall within its jurisdiction.

Shahadat, however, admitted some loopholes present in the overall operations of the port, "We don't claim to be angels. We do have some faults but the exaggerations by the TIB go beyond limits and reality."

He said the port authorities are mulling over some massive changes in the existing operating system to raise the port's capacity, competence and performance so that it can achieve a competitive edge over its counterparts across the globe.

"Some of the changes are already being taking place so that no body can term us inefficient in the future," he added.

Other top CPA officials present at the briefing followed the chairman's suit in taking swipe at the TIB report.

CPA Member (Operations) Kamrul Islam decried the report as an on-going hate campaign out of petty personal interests, "They have long been doing it to prove the port as a failed one."

UK under-secy

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tomorrow on a two-day official visit.

Jay will hold official talks with his Bangladesh counterpart Foreign Secretary Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury to review the entire gamut of bilateral relations and ways to further boost cooperation between the two countries. The talks will also focus on developments at regional and international arena.

A foreign ministry release said Jay will be accompanied by his wife Lady Jay and Head of the South Asia Department at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Stephen Smith.

Britain is the fifth largest bilateral development partner of Bangladesh and the third largest destination for export.

One more

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suggesting Walli's involvement.

"So he needs to be interrogated to find out the whereabouts of his accomplices," the IO told the court.

Earlier, Saibal Saha Partha, Abdur Rahman, Habib alias Hannan and Badsha Miah were shown arrested in the August 21 grenade attack case filed by the police on August 22.

Hasina emerges today

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On the eve of the showdown, AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil in a statement yesterday urged all secular democratic forces and members of different professional bodies and social organisations to attend today's rally at 3:00pm.

The AL Presidium sat in a meeting at 5:15pm yesterday with Sheikh Hasina in the chair. Meeting sources said the highest decision-making body of the party drafted a series of programmes and decided to adopt those after consulting with its allies.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30pm until 11:00am today.

"The programmes are yet to be finalised and we [AL and its allies] will announce fresh programmes simultaneously tomorrow," Jalil said after the meeting.

"The programmes will be fixed

after discussion with our allies in the

out-governments movement," he

added.

Party insiders however hinted at a hartal to be called on the occasion of the ruling coalition's third anniversary in office, October 10.

After the August-21 grenade attacks on its rally that had killed 20, the AL enforced four hartals in two weeks. It later dropped hartal from its strategy facing criticism from the business community and its left-leaning allies. But the ongoing crackdown on opposition activists in the form of mass arrests ahead of the grand rally has prompted the party to reconsider such tough programmes, sources said.

Earlier, on January 10 last, from another grand rally in Paltan Maidan Leader of the Opposition Hasina gave the government a month to fulfil her party's 15-point set of demands or step aside. The demands included an end to violence allegedly unleashed by the ruling alliance loyalists and also to corruption, nepotism and politicisation, and to disband the so-called alternative centre of power Hawa Bhaban.

SECURITY

Police made a sweep of the Paltan ground and the meeting podium by a dog squad yesterday afternoon. Explosive experts also inspected the area.

Contingents of police have already been deployed in and around the venue.

The podium will be encircled by a bamboo fencing along a safety chain and none will be allowed to enter the enclosed area without security clearance authorised by the AL.

Apart from law enforcers, a large number of party volunteers will also be engaged in the security.

Every one will have to go through metal detectors at different entry points to the rally ground. Ten teams of plainclothesmen will mingle with the crowd and look out for any untoward elements.

The high security measures are prompted by the widespread allegations of poor security arrangement by police for the August-21 meeting.

"We have been providing tighter security for the opposition rallies in the recent past, even better than those of the prime minister," said a top DMP official wishing anonymity.

The DMP high command held a meeting on Friday with an AL delegation to consult the security arrangement for today's rally.

Meanwhile, Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) workers yesterday repaired those parts of Paltan Maidan that were badly damaged in the recent downpours.

PREPARATIONS

The AL has directed its front organisations across the country to help produce a huge gathering today and its leadership believes if the government does not create any obstacle the rally will turn into a human sea.

On September 28, senior AL leaders held a preparatory meeting at the party's Dhanmondi office with the presidents and general secretaries of its Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Gazipur, Narsingdi and Tangail units and asked them to ensure large participation from their areas in today's meeting.

Earlier, from September 25 to 28, all the central leaders of the main opposition party in 15 teams visited most of the districts to mobilise and persuade people to join today's rally with the slogan 'Let's move to Dhaka to oust the government'.

Quality of life indexed

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"Failure to good governance accompanied by pressure of globalisation, poverty, unemployment, outdated legal system and lack of political commitment are specific threats to human security," says the report about Bangladesh.

Among the South Asian countries, Sri Lanka ranks the highest but it has been placed in 85th position among all the countries surveyed. Sri Lanka is followed by the Maldives (107th), India (163rd), Bhutan (142) and Bangladesh.

The report rated Bangladesh's performance in education, food security, reproductive health and science and information technology sectors to be in 'worst situation' while public expenditure in 'below-average' situation.

The report says 35 percent of Bangladesh's total population is suffering from undernourishment and the percentage remains unchanged for last one decade.

In the field of education, Bangladesh has made a significant progress in primary school enrolment with 90 percent in last one decade but only 64 percent complete primary education and illiteracy rates among 15-24 years hover around 50 percent.

According to the report, Bangladesh has also achieved progress in lowering infant mortality in last one decade but under-5 mortality still remains 77 per thousand.

About food security, the report says the recent widespread cases of starvation in northern region of the country indicates that food sovereignty has not yet been achieved due to an inefficient official distribution system.

Health security has improved for most of the population but the government's overall health expenditures are not directed at securing poor people's health. "The marginalised people continue to face strong barriers to access the corrupt public healthcare system and are forced to attend private clinics," mentioned the report.

Ctg criminals

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