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Forum to Protect Journalists holds protest rallies today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Journalists today hold simultaneous protest rallies at all press clubs across the country demanding proper investigation into all news-men killings and attacks on their colleagues and punishment to the perpetrators.

The rallies including the one at Jatiya Press Club in Dhaka will start at 11:00am.

The convenor of the Forum to Protect Journalists (FPJ), Reazuddin Ahmed, yesterday in a statement urged journalists and others involved in newspaper industry to observe the programme.

The statement said the FPJ has strongly felt the need to build up resistance against the killings of and threats on journalists.

The newly formed FPJ expects all

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Attacks on NGOs deepening crisis: Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina has appealed to all patriotic citizens irrespective of their party allegiance and opinions to pledge to pull down the Khaleda-Nizami government, which she dubbed as patron of all bomb and grenade attacks.

In a statement yesterday, Hasina, also president of the Awami League (AL), condemned the repeated bomb attacks on the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) engaged in poverty alleviation, removing illiteracy and empowering women under micro credit schemes.

She said Bangladesh has become the model of microcredit across the world. In this situation, repeated bomb attacks on the NGOs and fresh threats only deepen the crisis.

She said it is the responsibility of the government to track down the attackers and hand them over to the

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4 members of Islamist group held

UNB, Thakurgaon

Police on Thursday night arrested four members of Islamist militant group, Jam'atul Mujahidin, in the district town and at Laxmipur village in Sadar upazila.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided the WDB mosque in the town and nabbed Amanatullah, 26, son of Khijmatullah of Khapara in the town, Mamunur Rashid, 22, son of Ruhul Amin of Dinajpur district, and Mahub Alam, 27, son of Mojir Hossain of Sadar upazila.

On their statements, police later raided the house of Asiruddin at Laxmipur village and arrested him.

Police also recovered bomb manufacturing materials, printers,

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Biggest EPZ in limbo

Denied licence for 3 years for no express reason

SHARIEF KHAN

The government without any express reason has refrained for the last three years from licensing the country's biggest and private Korean Export Processing Zone (KEPZ) to operate, despite the fact that the Korean entrepreneurs have already invested about Tk 100 crore to develop it.

Sources at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), which deals with private EPZ, said the government in 1999 handed over 2,492 acres of land on the Karnaphuli river in Chittagong to KEPZ led by Korean company Youngone. At the same time, a gazette notification was made on the zone.

Other than the licence, KEPZ has

no formality left to kick-start its operation anytime.

Sources said, unofficially, KEPZ has become a victim of politicisation. After coming to office in October 2001, the BNP-led four-party alliance started to view KEPZ as a 'political beneficiary' of the previous government of Awami League.

Interestingly, the process of setting up KEPZ started back in 1995, during the previous BNP regime.

Since early 2002, the PMO has formed several committees to look into some alleged irregularities in KEPZ and the Private EPZ Act framed during the AL government. The first committee verbally asked the KEPZ management why it

needed such a huge area of 2,492 acres and hinted that it could do away with 500 acres.

In the end, in November 2003, a high-powered committee led by the principal secretary to the prime minister adjudged that there was no need to change the act and said, "in the interest of national image and foreign investment," KEPZ should be allowed to function without any delay.

Ever since, the government has kept mum on the issue, sources said. KEPZ on the other hand kept on writing to the PMO on a monthly basis requesting permission to operate.

Sources said, in recent times, a son of a powerful minister approached the KEPZ management

saying he could fix all the troubles for a fee of three million dollars.

To the hilly KEPZ site, where Youngone has constructed roads and structures since 1999 after paying the government Tk 64 crore for the land, goons linked to a ruling party lawmaker visit from time to time asking for payoffs, the sources said. The same MP on several occasions expressed grievance against the KEPZ management for not contracting out part of the development work launched in 2001 to him.

"The fate of KEPZ now in limbo also exemplifies how the government treats foreign investors," quips a PMO source, adding, "The government seems so concerned about the country's image while dealing with

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Bush warns Syria, Iran

US to back Israel against Iranian attack

AFP, REUTERS, Washington

President George W. Bush has heightened warnings to Syria after the assassination of former Lebanese prime minister Rafiq Hariri, and Iran over US suspicions that Tehran is seeking to build nuclear arms.

Bush said there was still time to use diplomacy to keep Iran from developing a nuclear weapon and vowed to support Israel if Tehran threatened its security.

"As you know, the Iranian issue hasn't even gotten to the (UN) Security Council yet. And so there's more diplomacy, in my judgment, to be done," Bush said at a news conference on Thursday.

His remarks suggested that any military action would wait at least until after the matter goes before the United Nations for possible sanc-

tions, should Washington choose that course.

"Iran is different from Iraq, very different," Bush said. He said the international community had tried diplomacy "over and over again" in Iraq before military action was taken.

Bush said the US relationship with Syria was deteriorating, that Washington wants an international investigation into the Hariri killing and that the United States would support Israel if it came under threat from Iran.

Syria and Iran would be key topics when Bush meets European leaders next week, the US leader told reporters after nominating John Negroponte, the US ambassador to Iraq, to become the new national intelligence director.

Bush did not say who the United States believed was responsible for

the killing of the former Lebanese leader in a suicide bomb attack in Beirut on Monday.

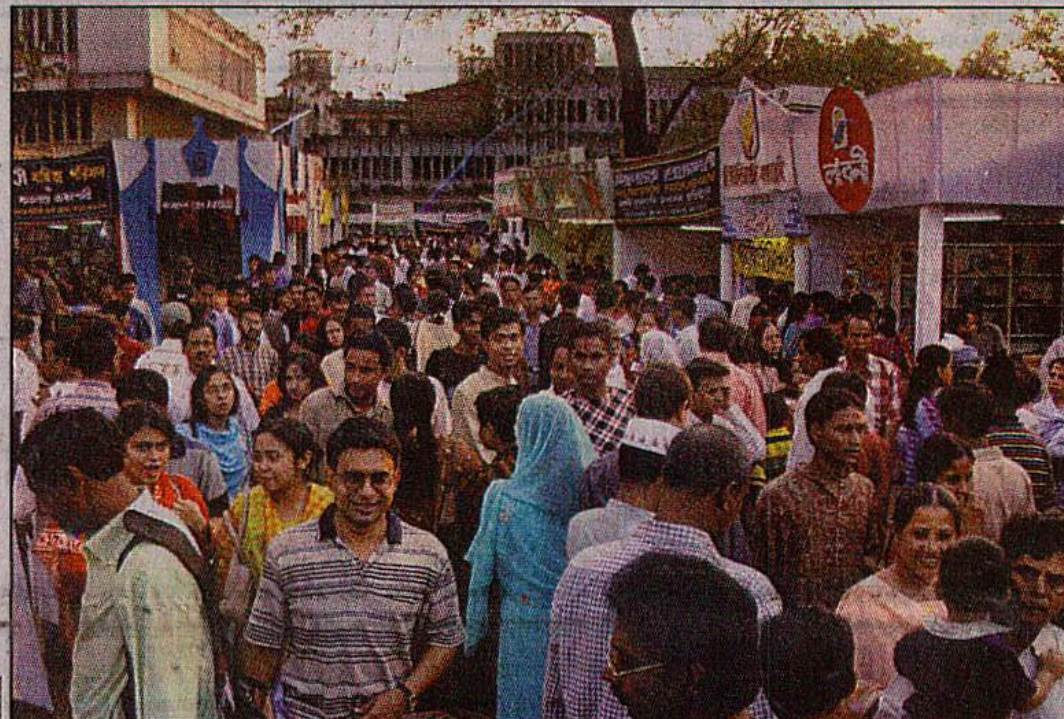
But the topic quickly moved to Lebanon's near neighbour, Syria, which has thousands of troops in Lebanon.

Bush said Syria was lagging behind changes in the rest of the Middle East and predicted that more information on who was responsible for the assassination would come out when he was in Europe.

"First we support the international investigation that will be going on to determine the killers of Mr Hariri," Bush said.

"We've recalled our ambassador, which indicates that the relationship is not moving forward; that Syria's out of step with the progress being made in the greater Middle East; that democracy is on the move,

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EKUSHEY IN THE AIR: Only two days to go before the Ekushey, thousands throng the Bangla Academy book fair undaunted by the bomb blasts at a Valentine's Day celebration at nearby Teacher-Student Centre of Dhaka University (DU), left, poet Shamsur Rahman inaugurates the 19th National Poetry Festival by hoisting the national flag on DU library premises, centre, and children engrossed in a hand writing contest organised by the National Museum on its compound yesterday.

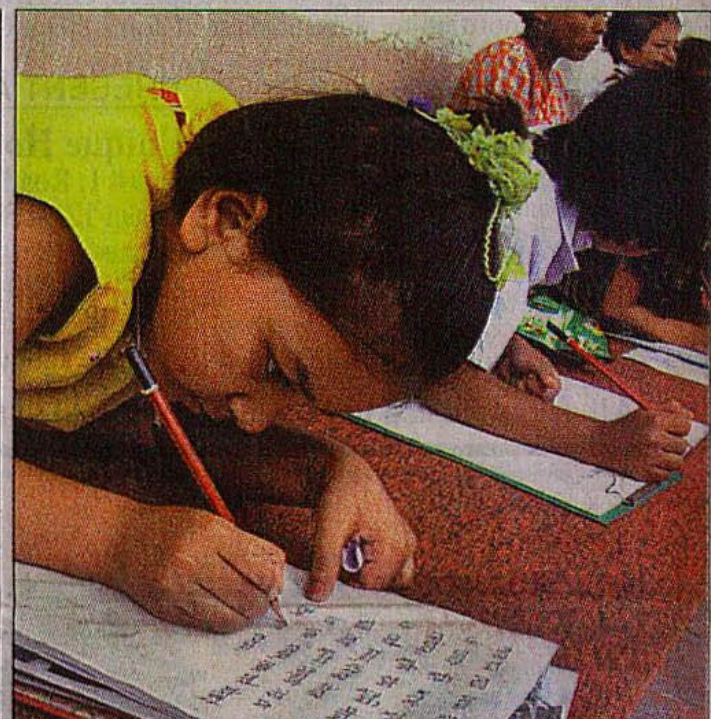


PHOTO: STAR

9 bombs recovered from Tangail ditch

Grenade found in Kurigram pond

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police yesterday recovered nine 'powerful' live bombs from a ditch in a village under Modhupur upazila of Tangail and a grenade from a pond in a village under Kurigram Sadar upazila.

The bombs found in a ditch beside Madhupur-Jamalpur highway at Baniyajan Uttarpara village under Dhanbari Police Station in Tangail were fitted with electric switches and batteries and kept in a plastic bag, police said.

A villager named Shaheen netted the bag accidentally while fishing in the ditch at around 11:45 Thursday

night. He hauled the bag out of the ditch taking it for something precious. But opening it he found nine bombs wrapped with scotch tape and fitted with electric switches and six-inch-long batteries.

Shaheen told the local union parishad chairman about the find and the chairman in turn informed the Dhanbari police, who rushed to the spot at around 12:15am yesterday and cordoned off the area.

A team of explosives experts of police led by ASP Mahbubul Alam examined the bombs in the morning and informed the army explosives experts at Shahid Salahuddin

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Frequent hartals disrupt academic calendars

MUSTAK HOSSAIN

Frequent hartals would upset the academic calendars of all educational institutions, apprehend teachers, students and their guardians alike.

In the face of the current volatile political situation, many schools in the capital have shifted their weekly holiday from Friday to Sunday, as strikes are often imposed on week-days.

The English medium schools are also considering reducing the week-end from the current two days to

one.

The authorities of certain elementary schools at Mohammadpur, Dhanmandi and Lalmatia in the city even received bomb threats as they tried to run schools on hartal days.

The main opposition Awami League, its allies and front organisations have already enforced 10 spells of hartals in the current academic year. And more strikes are likely in the coming weeks, predict political observers.

There are only 228 workdays at the government schools, as there are

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Cops seize books from Abu Sayeed's house

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective police yesterday confiscated a number of copies of two newly published books suspected of seditious contents by Awami League leader and former state minister for information Prof Abu Sayeed from his house.

One of the books titled Aghoshito Juddher Blueprint (blueprint of an undeclared war) in Bangla reportedly portrays the rise of extreme communism and Islamist militants in the country.

The second book, Brutal Crime Documents, in English depicts the alleged brutalities suffered by opposition activists since the 2001 general elections.

A dozen of Detective Branch (DB)

members raided and entered by force Sayeed's house No. 11 on Road No. 6 in Dhanmondi just after a press briefing where he had presented an overview of the books' contents.

"Entering the house the plainclothesmen closed the collapsible gate, detaining me and my party colleagues for about an hour. They were discourteous to every one in the house," Sayeed told The Daily Star.

He said when he wanted to see the search warrant police did not produce any. He termed the raid a violation of his right to express opinion.

Sayeed also claimed police took away around 35 copies of the books,

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Outlawed party leader killed in shootout

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

A regional leader of outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP-Janajuddho) was killed in a shootout between police and outlaws at a bordering village in Chuadanga Sadar upazila last night.

Police said the dead, Anwarul alias Zihad, was the operation commander of the underground outfit and an accused in at least 80 criminal cases, including 50 for murder.

The gun battle ensued when a team of the Detective Branch (DB) raided a house at Haiderpur village where at least 20 to 22 PBCP cadres were holding a secret meeting at about 8:30pm, police said.

Detectives encircled the house

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