

Form action bodies

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perform your duties as protectors of BNP and Jamaat," she told the law-enforcers from the rally amid tight security in and around the venue.

Hasina asked her party leaders and activists to prepare a list of the government-backed hoodlums and police officers who are harassing the opposition men by implicating them in false cases.

She presented a dismal picture of governance and failures of the government, asking it to step down immediately "showing respect to the public demand."

The opposition leader reiterated the demand for a free and fair election and urged the countrymen to be aware about their voting rights. She alleged the government is making all arrangements to rig the next general elections.

"We will resist any attempt to rig the election," she told the rally at Paltan Maidan that virtually turned into a human sea, as thousands of people from different districts poured into the historic ground and adjacent areas.

Chanting antigovernment slogans and carrying placards and banners, the AL and other opposition party activists flooded into the Gulistan, Noor Hossain Square, Golap Shah mazar, Press Club, Paltan, Danik Bangla crossing and Shapla Chatter areas.

The 11-party alliance and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) also held rallies as part of their simultaneously antigovernment agitation.

Referring to an allegation raised by the Prime Minister Khaleda Zia that the opposition, being instigated by a foreign country, hatched a conspiracy to topple the government, Hasina asked the prime minister to name that country.

The former prime minister alleged that BNP formed government with the religious extremist groups and anti-liberation forces and harboured militancy in the country.

The opposition leader appealed to the Bangladesh development partners to conduct an enquiry to find how much money the prime minister and her family members have smuggled out of the country and deposited in foreign banks.

The AL chief pledged that if her party gets a chance to govern the country again, it will bring down prices of essentials, curb corruption, establish rule of law and create jobs for unemployed youths. She also promised to ensure an

Hafiz

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Speedy Trial Tribunal-1 recorded Soheli's statement.

Later, Soheli was cross-examined by defence lawyers of the accused.

After three hours of cross-examination, the tribunal fixed March 5 for next hearing of the case.

In his deposition, Soheli told the court that at about 12:30pm on May 7 last year he was at their under construction building and he heard sound of bomb blasts from the nearby ground where a conference to form a Sechchasebok League committee was being held.

After a while, he saw a group of miscreants led by Kana Hafiz and Anu firing gunshots at the dais, the witness said.

Another group including Monir, Amir, Zahangir, Babu, Mahbub and Moshir joined the shooting and went towards the east, the witness said, adding that he then went to the spot and saw his father and 12 others lying injured on the field, who were taken to different hospitals for treatment.

The AL lawmaker was declared dead at the Combined Military Hospital, Dhaka the same day. Three others, two of them on the day, were also killed in the incident.

Soheli said that he came to know from other witnesses that Jatiyatadbadi Jubo Dal leader Nurul Islam Sarker was the mastermind behind the killings.

Twelve of the 30 accused in the case including Nurul Islam Sarker were present on the dock during the hearing. Of them, Kabir Hossain, Ayub, Pappu Sarker and Alamin are on bail, while Dipu and 17 others are at large.

Cops, BNP attack

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stopped seven buses carrying them to the capital.

At least 50 AL leaders and activists were injured in the police action.

AL sources said party men boarding 50 buses were coming to the city to join the Paltan rally. A team of Nababganj police stopped seven of the buses at Digherpar, Komorganj, Barahnagar and Tikarpur, leading to the trouble.

In Gournadi, four leaders of Jubo League and Chhatra League were wounded when workers of ruling BNP's youth front Jubo Dal and student wing Jatiyatadbadi Chhatra Dal beat them on Tuesday night on their way to Dhaka. The attackers also snatched money from them, our Barisal Correspondent reports.

Jobu Dal and Chhatra Dal leaders raided a launch carrying the AL adherents at Kayaria terminal at about 8:00pm and beat them.

A report from Mirzapur in Tangail said Jubo League leaders and activists barricaded the Dhaka-Tangail highway for half an hour after police stopped two buses, carrying them from Natore, at Mirzapur for three hours from 11:00am yesterday.

Sources said police stopped the buses on the plea that they did not have required papers. But in the

independent judiciary and independent and functional anti-corruption commission.

The former prime minister demanded retrospective effect to the national pay scale since 2002 saying that the prime minister (Khaleda Zia) and her cabinet colleagues had raised their remuneration in 2002 showing the reason of price hike.

She said at least 27 bomb blasts and grenade attacks took place in the country since the present government took office, killing 262 people. "But not a single culprit has been arrested while the government has failed to dig out any of the incidents."

"They (government) will not investigate the grenade attacks properly as they are involved in these crimes," the opposition leader alleged.

Hasina said the government deprived her of the opportunity to pay homage to the Bangladeshi peacemakers killed in Congo. "I am the opposition leader and a former prime minister, also in charge of defence ministry, but the government did not allow me to join the ceremony at the Army Stadium," she alleged.

Most of the senior leaders of the AL addressed the rally. **TIGHT SECURITY**
Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) took tight security measures in and around the venues of rallies of the AL and other opposition parties yesterday in the wake of several bomb attacks on political and cultural programmes.

Police checked most of the people who came to join the rally of the main opposition party. Besides, huge contingents of police were deployed in Shahbag, Press Club, Paltan, Motiheel, Bangabandhu Avenue and Dhaka University areas.

The law-enforcers stood guard atop most of the high-rise buildings near the venues of the opposition rallies. Police also restricted the movement of all types of vehicles on the streets adjacent to the meeting places.

The police also cordoned off the entire secretariat area.

LEFT 11-PARY AND JSD RALLIES
Addressing the 11-party alliance rally at Paltan crossing, Manzurul Ahsan Khan, president of the Communist Party of Bangladesh, criticised the government for its failure to check price hike of essentials and religious extremism in the country.

Khan accused the BNP-Jamaat government of harbouring the Islamist militants and demanded expulsion of the war criminals from the cabinet. He asked the government to ban politics based on religion.

Rashed Khan Menon, president of the Workers' Party of Bangladesh, said the BNP-led coalition government established a reign of terror throughout the country through criminal activities and corruption.

Referring to the ban on two extremist parties, Menon said, "The government is showing double standard in the name of banning Islamist extremist groups as there are extremists within the government."

He said the government decision to ban two extremist groups are aimed at pleasing the donors.

Convener of the 11-party Nurul Islam criticised the government for extra-judicial killings, rising fundamentalism and bad governance.

Gono Forum leader Pankaj Bhattacharya, Gonoatari Party leader Azizul Islam and some other senior leaders of the 11-party also addressed the rally.

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu and other leaders of the party from a separate rally at Muktangan also asked the government to resign. "The countrymen no longer want to see the misuse of the BNP-Jamaat government."

"Overthrowing the present government though a united movement will be meaningless, if we cannot ensure free and fair elections," Inu told the rally.

BNP cadres rough up UNO

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Some cadres of the ruling BNP's youth front assaulted a Debhata Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) yesterday morning allegedly for saving another officer of the local upazila settlement court who was also assaulted by them.

Quoting eyewitnesses, police said a land dispute case between Pancharam Biswas and Kishori Mohon of the same village has long been pending with the Debhata Upazila Settlement Court. A group of Jubadal cadres, led by upazila Jubadal General Secretary Abdul Awal Mintu, pressed assistant settlement officer Monsur Ali to give a judgement in favour of Kishori Mohon. They then beat Monsur Ali on Sunday when the judgement ruled against Kishori Mohon.

The youths were angered again when the incident was published in the local dailies on Tuesday, prompting them once more to attack the assistant settlement officer. Hearing the news, UNO Ali Kader rushed to the scene to save Monsur Ali, upon which the Jubadal cadres assaulted him also.

They also beat up local journalist Akhtaruzzaman and damaged his camera.

Confirming the incident, UNO Ali Kader said the Jubadal leaders begged pardon to him. A general diary (GD) was filed with Debhata police station.

10 injured

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Narsingdi Sadar Hospital and different private clinics.

Police Super of Narsingdi Meer Rezaul Alam visited the spot on that night after getting information of the bomb explosion.

When contacted, Officer-in-Charge of the Palash police station Mizanur Rahman however denied the incident of any bomb explosion.

The urs is held every year at the shrine of Jainab Bibi and her husband Dewan Sharif who founded the Parulia Thir Dome mosque during the Mughal period.

Kibria family

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residence and conclude by flying doves at Abahani ground. The family requested all the people for peace to attend the programme wearing blue clothes.

"We also urge all to wear blue clothes on Thursdays. We hope that slowly Thursday will become a blue day for peace," said Rina Sultana Kibria, wife of Shah AMS Kibria's son Reza Kibria.

On March 18 the family will form a human chain with the signed posters that arrived from different districts of the country and abroad, said Asma Kibra, wife of Shah AMS Kibria.

UNB adds: Home ministry has extended by two weeks the duration of investigation by a government probe committee into the killing of former finance minister.

The government formed the five-member committee, led by Deputy Inspector General of Police AKM Mahfuzur Rahman, on January 30 after Kibria and four others were killed in a grenade attack at Boilder Bazar, Habiganj on January 27.

JU flouts

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a selection committee cannot recommend appointing more teachers than asked for.

Earlier on September 12 last year, the JU authorities issued circulars for recruiting two lecturers at zoology and three at archaeology.

Several teachers from both the departments alleged the five posts were illegally created to regularise the teachers working on temporary basis.

However, Vice-chancellor Khandaker Mustahidur Rahman, also chief of the selection committees, said, "The selection committee can recommend appointment of qualified teachers if any department requires."

Opposition

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The agitation programmes will start on March 13 and continue up to April 6 also to press home various other demands.

Urging people to join the out-governement movement, the opposition leaders said they will enforce tougher programmes after the public examinations end next month.

"We did not declare tougher programmes now due to the ensuring SSC examinations. But we will go for such programmes after the examinations," Leader of the Opposition and AL President Sheikh Hasina said at the party's grand rally yesterday.

Other programmes announced yesterday include forming human walls in cities and district towns on March 13 and in all upazilas, demanding trial of all the killings in bomb attacks and arrest of criminals involved in the biggest ever arms smuggling.

Besides, "hunger processions" will be organised countrywide on March 23 and country-wide demonstration against rise of extremist groups on March 20.

The opposition parties also expressed solidarity with the programmes of Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad on April 1 and rallies and processions from April 2 to 4 in support of the demands of workers. The parties will extend support to the workers' strike on April 5-6.

Ex-Bac staff ignores

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After a long debate over attaching former Bac officials with the commission, Cabinet Secretary Saadat Hussain said on December 18 that former Bac officials and employees should be treated as the government's reserve staff since Bac's dissolution on November 21.

But, finding some Bac officials still continuing work at the ACC, the government on January 3 reminded the Bac staff of its order not to work for the commission.

Again on January 29, the Cabinet Division sent a letter to the ACC chair and the two commissioners questioning the legality of some Bac officials holding 'non-existing' positions and issuing letters on behalf of the ACC.

"This is illegal and contrary to service discipline," the letter said, adding, if necessary, the government will take legal steps against them.

The cabinet on February 28 also made an order not to attach or get any Bac staff work for the ACC before the screening ends.

Investigators raid

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Police took away the recovered goods in several large bags, some of which might be to JIC, said sources. Two investigators from JIC also participated in the raids.

Asked if the documents can legally be given to JIC, a source said the investigating officials concerned will carry the documents to JIC only to use them as exhibits before court.

Top police officials remained tight-lipped about the raid but confirmed they did not find any arms or ammunition.

Earlier, a metropolitan magistrate's court in Rajshahi issued a search warrant after police Inspector Ahsanullah of Bogra submitted a prayer following a requisition from Kotlalipara Police Station (PS) of Gopalganj and Gabtali PS of Bogra.

Newsmen and photojournalists were not allowed to enter the compound, and they were barred from walking on Rajshahi Road, on which the madrasa and Ahab offices are situated.

Meanwhile, the three-member probe body investigating the grenade attack on the Rangpur office of Brac on February 16 submitted a

report to Rangpur police super last Sunday indicating the involvement of an Islamist militant group, our correspondent in Rangpur reports.

The body, headed by Additional Police Superintendent Rafiqul Islam, did not disclose the name of the militant group when it submitted its investigation report to the police super Sunday, 11 days after its formation.

One of the probe-body members said on condition of anonymity that the body cannot name the Islamist group because there are no witnesses to the incident. But, due to the letters 'JMG' inscribed on the cover of the grenades, the probe body concluded that the planned attack might have been the act of an Islamist militant group.

Meanwhile, the Detective Branch of police and four other agencies have been interrogating two Jamaetul Mujahedeen members for six days, but have failed to bring out any information regarding the members' involvement in anti-state activities.

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NCBs fail to cut credit

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keep their credit growth limited within 5 percent at the same time.

But according to the December '04 figures now available, Sonali Bank's expenses rose by 8.4 percent and stood at Tk 390 crore, Janata Bank's by 4.71 percent to Tk 311 crore, Agrani Bank's by 6.39 percent to Tk 233 crore and Rupali Bank's by 2.65 percent to Tk 117 crore.

Explaining why their costs went up, the NCBs told Bangladesh Bank (BB) that they had to spend large sums of money to file and pursue a huge number of cases against defaulters at the Artharin Adalat last year. Besides, costs of petroleum, gas and power went up and accordingly basic expenses of the banks grew.

Sonali Bank's credit growth marked a rise of 8.29 percent to Tk 16,811 crore, Janata Bank's 7.18 percent to Tk 10,123 crore, Agrani Bank's 6.5 percent to Tk 8,403 crore and Rupali Bank's 12.47 percent to Tk 4,289 crore.

The banks attributed this growth to a sharp rise in demand for credits last year due to the twin floods.

The MoU also asked the banks to reduce their default loans, especially recovering from the top 20

defaulters.

The Rupali Bank has a total of Tk 772 crore default loan. Top defaulters owed it Tk 551 crore. It succeeded in recovering only Tk 2.78 crore from these top defaulters and Tk 56 crore from the remaining defaulters.

Bank sources said that out of the Tk 551 crore due from the top defaulters, Tk 277 crore is held by different government entities. And the government is not paying it.

Janata Bank has a total of Tk 2,199 crore default loan, of which top defaulters are holding back Tk 513 crore. The bank recovered Tk 9.31 crore from the top ones and regularised Tk 128 crore of their loan. The bank recovered Tk 184 crore from general defaulters.

"Two of our top defaulters are no longer in the defaulters' list as they regularised their loans," said a Janata Bank official.

Agrani Bank has Tk 2,692 crore default loan, of which top defaulters held Tk 638 crore. The bank recovered Tk 102 crore from the top ones.

Sonali Bank has Tk 4,958 crore default loan with top defaulters holding Tk 1,555 crore. The bank could recover only Tk 41 lakh from the top ones.

Dhabi group offers

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lead by the group's Chief Executive Officer Bashir A Taher also expressed their intention to invest in pharmaceuticals and real estate sectors.

The delegation that had arrived here on Tuesday on a five-day visit apprised the Bol chief on the group's serious ambition to expand its operations into Bangladesh market.

The delegation comprising top executives of the group's telecoms and banking units also said they would consider a Bol proposal to develop a tourism facility centre in Cox's Bazar.

Talking to the media after the meeting, Bol executive chair said although the delegation did not specifically mention the planned investment volume, if all of its projects get implemented, it may require nearly \$2 billion.

Rahman said the group has developed through modern tourism infrastructure the Desert City of Abu Dhabi as a unique destination for international tourists. So, it can utilise that experience in developing the Cox's Bazar tourism centre.

According to the Dhabi Group's proposals, it wants to construct an expressway between Dhaka and Chittagong, which would provide exclusive and non-stop services to vehicles in exchange of a certain amount of toll.

Telecommunications sector tops the group's priority list for investment in Bangladesh. Apart from mobile phone service, it wants to operate as an international gateway for Bangladesh subscribers, alongside Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board.

Bol sources said the group's

chairman, Nahayan Mabarak Al Nahayan, a member of the UAE royal family, might come to Bangladesh in April, if negotiations on investment proposals in telecoms and acquisition of Samil Bank of Bahrain by Bank Alfalah, a concern of the group, make any notable progress.

The delegation yesterday also met Post and Telecommunications Minister Aminul Haque and discussed its investment proposal in telecoms sector.

Some members of the delegation will go to Chittagong today to conduct a preliminary feasibility study on opening a branch of Bank Alfalah in the port city. While the rest of the delegation members will meet with State Minister for Power Iqbal Hasan Mahmood, State Minister for Civil Aviation and Tourism Mir Mohammad Nasiruddin and Bangladesh Bank Governor Fakhruddin Ahmed today.

The proposal of the UAE group is the second largest investment plan by a single investor in Bangladesh's history after India's Tata Group, which is now carrying out the preliminary work to implement its \$2 billion investment in steel, power and fertiliser sectors, Bol sources said.

The other members of the delegation are Bank Alfalah CEO Parvez A Shahid, Urdu International-Abu Dhabi CEO Ali Al Awais, Adviser to the Dhabi Group Board of Directors Marwan Zawaydah and Bank Alfalah Corporate Architect Ahmed Muktar.

FH HALL HC orders to reinstate word Muslim

BDNEWS, Dhaka

The High Court (HC) yesterday ordered the Dhaka University authorities to reinstate the word 'Muslim' with the name of its students' dormitory Fazlul Huq Hall as it was before 1972.

A HC division bench comprising Justice Joyntul Abedin and Justice Miftaaddin Chowdhury issued the rule.

Advocate Shamsul Alam, a lawyer of the Supreme Court, had filed a writ petition challenging the validity of the Dhaka University Syndicate's June 16, 1972 decision to delete the word 'Muslim' from the name of 'Fazlul Huq Muslim Hall'.

The HC on June 12, 2004, issued a rule upon the Vice Chancellor and the Registrar of Dhaka University and Provost of Fazlul Huq Hall to show cause as to why the Syndicate's decision of deleting the word 'Muslim' from the name of the hall should not be declared illegal.

The HC yesterday declared 1972 decision of the University Syndicate illegal and the rule absolute.

Advocate ABM Nurul Islam moved for the petitioner before the court while Assistant Attorney General Zaman Akhter Bulbul stood for the university.

Earlier, the High Court ordered the Dhaka University authorities to reinstate the word 'Muslim' with its student's dormitory Saimullah Hall as it was before 1972.

PM

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pointed out that the government had earlier denied the existence of Islamist militants, but later it banned two militant organisations following intelligence reports.

He referred to the ongoing crackdown on the Islamist militants and wanted to know if the government would punish those who had been denying the existence of such militant outfits or reward those who reported their activities.

As Siddiqui put the question as a supplementary to another question on poverty reduction, he said he would not mind if the PM did not respond. The PM termed the question irrelevant, but gave him the assurance.

Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar, who was in the chair, also said the question was irrelevant.

The prime minister while answering the question on poverty reduction listed the government's various antipoverty steps including housing, rehabilitation, training and micro-credit programmes for the poor.

"As we have created huge employment opportunities in villages across the country, people are not pouring into the cities," she said.

PM LATE

The House yesterday witnessed a different scenario. The session began at 4:55pm, 25 minutes behind the schedule. The quorum was fulfilled at 4:40pm but the speaker could not start the day's business due to the absence of the PM.

The PM's question-answer session was at the top of yesterday's agenda. When the speaker took his seat, more than a hundred lawmakers were present in the House, which is unusual in the current session, plagued with quorum crisis.

Bhutan's new

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here yesterday, the Secretariat said in a press release.

Dorji, who is the eighth Secretary General of the grouping, succeeded Rahim, who left Kathmandu on Monday after completing his tenure.

Before joining the Saarc Secretariat, Dorji served as Bhutan's first resident Ambassador to Thailand.

His appointment to the top post of the regional body was made on rotational basis in alphabetical order by the Saarc Council of Ministers of the member states.

Dorji, who hails from a district in western Bhutan, is father of three children.

UN forces

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country, raping and pillaging. Their conflict is rooted in land and commercial rivalries in a region rich in gold, timber and diamonds.

Congo's Defense Minister Adolphe Onusumba told the news agency in Bunia that he supported the action of the UN troops, known by their French acronym MONUC.

"I was not informed about any operation that was conducted by MONUC in the area ... but anything that is done to disarm these militias is in the interest of the Congolese," he said.

Congo's fragile government is struggling to impose its authority on the eastern warlords and said on Monday a further 3,000 soldiers would be sent to support a brigade in Bunia.

The fighting in the east has cast a shadow over Congo's efforts to draw a line under a wider five-year war that officially ended in 2003 and which killed nearly 4 million people, mostly from hunger and disease.

Elections are due to be held in June, but instability in the east as well as logistical problems have raised questions about whether the polls can be held on time.

Gittu' Nasir, 2 more

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headquarters at Patenga here at around 8:30 Tuesday morning and quizzed extensively.

"During interrogations Gittu confessed to all the criminal activities and killings he was accused of committing in the last few years," said a Rab press release yesterday. "He also disclosed that he has kept his personal AK-47 rifle at a hideout near Sher Khan Dighi at Khondakia village in Hathazari," it added.

Sources said, acting on his confession, a Rab-7 team took him to the spot and recovered the rifle, 30 bullets and a magazine from under the ground behind a toilet on the south bank of Sher Khan pond that evening.

Gittu was then brought back to the Rab-7 headquarters and interrogated further.

Rab said, "This time he started divulging sensational information about his gang and cadres and the wide range of criminal acts by his associates Habib Khan, Gias Hazzarika, Taleban Bolel, Azrail Delwar and Sajjad Khan, and admitted that he has more arms at Charia Havilderpara village."

Following these leads, a 10-member Rab-7 team took him to the village at around 2:15am yesterday.

"As they reached near a tin-shed house owned by one Mohammad Musa, near a brick kiln, Gittu's gang waylaid and attacked the Rab team to snatch their leader," Rab said.

As the elite crack team opened counter-fire a half-an-hour gunfight ensued that saw an exchange of 40 to 50 rounds of bullets.

"At one stage, Gittu started to run to make an escape but fell in the line of fire and was hit by bullets. He was rushed in a critical condition to Hathazari