

Thousands join human walls

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bands and ribbons held banners that read slogans like "Down with Khaleda-Nizami government", "Give food, cloth, or quilt" and "Khaleda-Nizami are mastermind of grenade attacks and religious extremism."

The demonstrators chanted antigovernment slogans in protest against the price hike of essentials, repeated grenade attacks and rise of extremism and fundamentalist groups. Many of them were seen singing patriotic songs.

The programme drew attention of passers-by and people returning from offices.

In the ongoing course of agitation, the opposition parties will form human walls at upazila level on March 20, hold countrywide hunger processions on March 23 and enforce a dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal on March 27.

INDHAKA

Three human walls were formed in the capital -- starting from Jatrabari, Tongi Bridge and Gabtoli bus terminal -- towards Zero Point.

The busy roads in Sayedabad, Motijheel, Gulistan, Uttara, Rampura, Malibagh, Kakrail, Paltan, Russell Square, Elephant Road, Shahbagh, High Court, Curzon Hall, Nagar Bhaban and Bangabandhu Avenue areas were covered by the programme.

Senior leaders of the mainstream opposition parties took part in the demonstration in front of Mukhtangon.

"People of Bangladesh have shown no-confidence in the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition once again by joining the human wall spontaneously," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil told reporters at the end of the programme.

Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim standing near Paltan Crossing said, "We are now holding mass awareness programme and through this we will go for tougher programmes."

JSD President Hasanul Haq Inu said, "People will force this government to step down and pave the way for a fresh election."

"This is just the beginning of a vigorous movement and we will continue our programme until the government resigns," said AL Joint Secretary Obaidul Quader.

Workers Party president Rashed Khan Menon and AL leaders Zillur Rahman, Amir Hossain Amu, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim took part in the programme near Mukhtangon.

The human wall, fifth of its kind in the last one year, drew significant number of women demonstrators. "I'm here to join the programme only to protest the price hike of essentials," said Anjuman Ara, a housewife.

Kamal Ahmed, a demonstrator from Mohammadpur, said the government has failed to bring the killers of former finance minister Shah AMS Kibria to book. "The lives

of politicians as well as common people are insecure," he observed.

"If the government does not crush the rising fundamentalism, then the country will face disaster in near future," said Amir Uddin, a resident of Dhanmondi who joined the antigovernment human wall programme.

OTHER DISTRICTS

Our Rajshahi correspondent adds: The opposition-sponsored human wall programme was observed peacefully in the divisional headquarters yesterday.

Hundreds of political leaders and workers, cultural activists and professionals formed the human wall stretching from Kumarpara to Monti Chatter in the city.

After the one-hour programme, Awami League brought out a procession in protest against the crisis of electricity and water.

The human wall programme was observed in the city peacefully, stretching from Bangladesh Bank intersection to Dakbungalow.

Our Sylhet correspondent reports: Opposition activists formed the human wall near the city's Court Point area. The programme was observed peacefully.

Our district correspondents also reported that the human wall programme was observed peacefully in Rangpur, Jessore, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, Gopalganj and Bandarban.

Constable arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Khulna*

Police arrested a constable and an extremist along with two alleged prostitutes from Talimpur village in Rupsha upazila in the early hours yesterday.

The constable, Ruhul Amin of Khulna Range Reserve Force, has been suspended and closed to the police lines.

On receiving information, Rupsha police arrested Ruhul, extremist Moniruzzaman Monir and Nasima, 30, and Rashida, 28, from a house at 4:30am.

Members of the Village Defence Police (VDP) alleged Ruhul along with extremists used to visit Nasima's house frequently for immoral purpose.

The police said they are questioning the women about their link to extremists and the constable.

4 outlaws

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spot. The police team returned fire which left four outlaws dead on the spot," said a police officer.

Two of them were identified as Abdul Qudus (40) and Mohammad Alam (45). Police sent all the four bodies to morgue.

Rajbari Police Super Matuir Rahman Sheikh claimed that six policemen were injured in the clash. UNB district correspondent said attacks, the ministry said. There was no immediate comment from the US military.

A US marine commander opened a probe into possible abuse of Iraqi detainees by six soldiers on February 27, the military said.

In a defection for the US-led coalition, Ukraine confirmed it would start withdrawing its 1,650 troops from Iraq on Tuesday, with an initial pullout of 150 soldiers. (AFP, Reuters)

6 million

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Bangladesh Rice Foundation and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

"We have over 40 food safety net programmes to address the ultra poor and the vulnerable at the times of disaster," Farid said, adding that there has been a decline in food-based safety nets in recent years.

Referring to Monga, the near-famine situation that occurs during September-October every year in the country's northern region, Farid said it is due to lack of income diversification in that particular area.

He said despite remarkable growth in food production in the country, the number of malnourished children is on the rise. He suggested that the situation could be controlled by widening the food safety net programmes.

"The 28 million ultra poor in Bangladesh who suffer from a chronic food insecurity, take 1,800 calories per day against the minimum requirement of 2,200," said the IFPRI senior research fellow Dr Akhter Ahmed.

Any sudden natural calamities lead to acute food insecurity for the poor, he said.

Though the food production has grown considerably, nutrition intake among the poor in particular falls far short of what is required, Food and Disaster Management Minister Kamal Ibne Yusuf said at the workshop.

"At least 43 percent of people remain under the food-based poverty line," he said.

Senior researcher of the BIDS Dr Sajjad Zahir, among others, spoke at the session chaired by Brac Executive Director Abdul Mueyed Chowdhury.

Burn patients suffer

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adequate number of doctors leads to patients remaining unattended without even any initial treatment of burn injuries.

A recent incident of death of a 26-year-old housewife, Tania Akter Shima, who allegedly died after being given an intravenous drug by an attending nurse, is a testimony to such allegations.

According to various sources, the nurse who administered the drug had delayed treatment by four hours and no doctor had supervised the treatment.

Relatives of the victim said that within half an hour of receiving the painkiller the patient, suffering twenty-five per cent burn from boiling liquid, cried out in panic before collapsing. "We called for immediate help when my niece cried out. Some of us ran down the corridor to find doctors but there were none," alleged Bayezidur Rahman, uncle of the victim.

Shima, hospitalised on March 4 night under Dr Shamsuddin Ahmed, died at 7:30pm last Wednesday in bed-15 on the second floor. She was shifted to the Burn Unit from the adjacent DMCH two days after her admission since there were no beds available.

"Since admission of my daughter we have noticed that after 2:30pm no doctors pay visit to the unit leaving patients in the hands of sisters and ward-bos who which is unacceptable," said Mohiuddin Howlader, father of Shima.

An investigation by The Daily Star revealed that many of the senior doctors of the burn unit often leave the capital for days without informing the concerned authorities. Professor AJM Salek, head of the department of the unit, did not attend office for four days since February 28. Sources in the burn unit said that Professor Salek visits Chittagong once a month for re-constructive surgery on voluntary missions at Centre Point Hospital.

When contacted, Dr Salek however claimed that he was present on his duties on February 28 and the following three days. "The allegations of my travel to Chittagong are completely baseless," he said.

Dr Shamanta Lal Sen, project director of the unit, along with Associate Professor Syed Shamsuddin Ahmed and Assistant Professor Md Abdur Rashid--also staff of the unit, had gone to Kulaura in Moulvibazar for voluntary services to perform re-constructive surgeries on cleft-lip on Sunday and Monday last.

Dr Kamrun Nahar, although appointed as a clinical biochemist for the unit, currently performs the duties of a medical officer.

When contacted about the allegations, Dr Sen admitted going on a voluntary mission to perform re-constructive surgery in Moulvibazar and said, "To perform such charity work my team and I have government orders."

Regarding the allegations of the duty doctor's absence on the day Shima died, Dr Sen said, "So far as I have investigated, it shows that two medical officers--Dr Shamim Kabir and Dr Kamrun Nahar--were present at the time of her death."

Meanwhile, Dr Shamsuddin Ahmed claimed that Shima could not have possibly died from reactions of a painkiller like pethidine.

"In fact, after administering the painkiller the patient walked with her husband in the corridor. Later she took food while she was lying in bed which may have caused obstruction in her windpipe that probably led to breathing problems and eventually to death," he said.

He also said that the relatives were requested about Shima's autopsy but they refused and took the body away.

According to sources, when the government approved building the unit adjacent to the DMCH, it also proposed sanctioning posts of at least 20 doctors and anesthetists but until now only four posts of medical officers have been sanctioned.

"We are suffering from a serious crisis of doctors which is why it often becomes difficult to manage patients during busy hours," Dr Sen acknowledged.

The unit now has ten surgeons and five anesthetologists. The unit has no Class IV employees which also hampers patients management. The intensive care unit virtually has no manpower to run it.

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malnutrition in Bangladesh.

He also noted that middlemen's illegal toll collection and intervention deprive the farmers' of their just price of produces.

Agriculture Minister MK Anwar stressed enhancing investment in agriculture and was critical of the rich nations' farm subsidy policy.

"The core problems of widespread poverty, growing inequality, rapid population growth and rising unemployment all find their origins in the stagnation and often retrogression of economic life in rural areas. Principal reasons for such deterioration are: a) drastic reduction in public investment in the field of agriculture, b) lack of adequate external resources, c) highly subsidised agriculture in developed countries, d) dumping of agricultural products by developed countries and e) a sense of complacency following the green revolution achievements," Anwar said.

Former finance minister M Syeduzzaman, who now heads the BRF, said, "Agriculture is the main source of livelihood for about two-thirds of our people. Poverty afflicts nearly 40 to 50 percent of the population and the majority of the poor live in rural areas, depending on agriculture. While the country faces numerous challenges and threats, enormous opportunities also exist to improve agriculture for the benefit of poor farmers and consumers."

BIDS DG Shahabuddin observed, "Development priorities still need to recognise the primacy of agricultural growth in providing food and income security to rural households in Bangladesh. We need appropriate strategies to deal with the new challenges and opportunities to make agriculture more flexible, diversified and efficient. Unfortunately,

director of the unit, along with Associate Professor Syed Shamsuddin Ahmed and Assistant Professor Md Abdur Rashid--also staff of the unit, had gone to Kulaura in Moulvibazar for voluntary services to perform re-constructive surgeries on cleft-lip on Sunday and Monday last.

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Govt done well

Bangladesh has under-invested in agricultural sector. For sustained growth, a continued development in technology, institutions and infrastructure is essential."

According to recent projections from IFPRI, if progressive policies are implemented in South Asia, child malnutrition rates in the region could be reduced to half by 2030.

"Bangladesh initiated a process of market-led policies during the 1980s, with a deepening in the 1990s," noted IFPRI DG Dr von Braun. "Trade liberalisation helped Bangladesh move rapidly towards achieving food security targets. Widespread adoption of Green Revolution technology and modern irrigation practices has increased food grain productivity, and the country has achieved near self-sufficiency in rice production, even with declining area under cultivation."

He promised that "IFPRI will work with policymakers and other collaborators in the region to identify strategies to accelerate the progress towards eradicating hunger and poverty in Bangladesh."

The discussants also noted that the seminar could not have been better timed, as Bangladesh now stands on the crossroads of attaining self-sufficiency in food, rice to be more precise, but at the same time facing the challenge of loosing prime farmlands due to growing urbanisation and industrialisation.

They felt, with its large population base, Bangladesh is left with the option of increasing farm output making best use of modern technology and make gradual shift from rice-led growth in agriculture to production-rise in cash crops and develop agro-based industries.

Irked BNP MPs

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The parliamentary body has recommended allowing the lawmakers to place the bills in parliament.

Members of the committee at a meeting on January 4 threatened to resign in protest against what they said was the speaker's negative attitude towards the bills.

They also decided that the committee would not discuss any new bill until the old ones are tabled in parliament. Since then, the committee has not sat again, sources said.

In the wake of a wide resentment among lawmakers, Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar did agree to allow the bills to be placed in the House in the current session. But, the law ministry's recent instruction has again made it uncertain.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sircar said it will not be possible to place any private members' bill in parliament during the current session due to a lack of time. "I hope it'll be possible

to place the bills in the next session."

Committee member and BNP deputy Abu Yousuf Khalilur Rahman said there is no such provision in the rules of procedure for taking prior permission from the prime minister to place private members' bills. "I was not in Dhaka for the last few days. I'll look into the letter circulated by the speaker. Then I'll be clear on the issue," he told The Daily Star.

Lambasting the instruction, BNP MP Abu Hena said he is very unhappy at the fate of his bill becoming uncertain.

He said, "It depends on the government whether it passes any private members' bill or not. But it should at least allow the private members to place their bills in parliament."

"It'll not be possible to work as private members in parliament if we're forced to follow the instruction," he noted.

Long agenda

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project was conceived four years back under the Power System Master Plan and was later shelved.

The other projects that are expected to be in the agenda are a water treatment plant at Pagla near Narayanganj, development of a sewerage system in northern city, installation of five lakh digital telephones, opening of an airlink between Dhaka and south Chinese city of Kunming, improving the Dhaka-Lakhsham railway line, peaceful use of nuclear energy and use of Chinese credit worth 130 million RMB.

Besides, three separate memorandum of understanding (MoU) on cooperation in agriculture, flood control and public security are expected to be initialised during the Chinese leader's visit.

An official of the Civil Aviation Ministry said opening of direct airlink between Dhaka and the south Chinese city of Kunming has been finalised and a bilateral agreement will be signed on this during the visit of the Chinese Premier. Under the agreement the national airlines of the two countries will swap flights between Dhaka and Kunming, he noted.

The Chinese Prime Minister will lead a 102-member high-profile delegation including three important ministers. The visit is also coinciding with the 30th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and China.

Baby food

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with those in the same period of last year. But the prices of rice, pulse, milk powder, fish and meat appear to be on rise, he observed.

"Sharp devaluation of Taka against US dollar, and increase in other costs and related impact on basic and supplementary duties are the reasons for such rise," said M Zulfiqar Hussain, human resources and corporate affairs director of Nestlé Bangladesh yesterday.

Smoking

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with Tk 50. However, it says the authorities or caretaker of any public place or transport can make special arrangements for smokers.

The category of public places include educational institutions, government, semi-government and autonomous offices, libraries, lifts, hospitals, clinics, court buildings, airports, sea and river port buildings, railway stations, bus terminals, ferries, cinema halls, covered exhibition centres, theatres, children's parks and other places designated by gazette notifications.

According to the new law, putting up billboards and printing leaflets and handbills or any other documents, including films and videotapes, containing advertisement of tobacco are banned.

The law dictates that no company will be allowed to distribute tobacco free of cost, arrange any competition and make any offer of scholarship or donation to publicise tobacco products. A punishment of three months imprisonment or a fine of Tk 1,000 or both is enforceable for its violation.

Piloting the bill, Mosharraf Hossain said it is aimed at discouraging smoking and sales of cigarettes and tobacco products in the country.

Opposition Jatiya Party (Ershad) lawmakers, however, were critical about the new law and said it would create new scopes of corruption for police. Police will harass innocent people by misusing the law, they apprehended.

The House yesterday passed two more bills -- one placed by Education Minister Osman Faruk styled the Computer Training and Research Academy Bill 2005 and the Inland Shipping (Amendment) Bill 2005 placed by Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain.

BB show-causes

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legal action against Mazid and the bank's branch managers concerned under the BCA and Anti Money Laundering Act.

The investigation found gross violation of banking rules in the opening of around 17,000 accounts with different branches of the bank.

Those accounts were later found to be fake.

The branch managers concerned said they were forced to open these accounts after they got verbal instructions from Managing Director Mazid, and Syed Nowsher Ali, manager of the bank's Banani branch.

On February 12, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) suspended a Tk 55 crore public floating of Premier Bank after around 25,000 fake beneficiary owners' (BO) accounts were found in its preliminary investigation.

The Bangladesh Bank on February 14 launched an investigation into the Premier Bank public floating scam after being officially informed by the SEC.

It is mandatory to mention a bank account number, the branch name and a BO account number in case of applying for shares in Initial Public Offering (IPO).

On the other hand, it is also mandatory to mention a bank account number and the branch of a bank while opening a BO account.

Besides Dhaka Stock Exchange, many small as well as big investors suspect that the Premier Bank might have tried to manipulate the IPO process.

Step up preparations for possible war

Chinese president asks military without naming Taiwan

AFP, *Beijing*

China's President Hu Jintao told the military yesterday it should step up preparations for a possible war, and to safeguard territorial integrity, in apparent reference to reunifying with Taiwan.

"We shall step up preparations for possible military struggle and enhance our capabilities to cope with crises, safeguard peace, prevent wars and win the wars if any," Hu said shortly after he was appointed to the country's top military post.

"We must continuously enhance our sense of political responsibility, and always place the task of defending national sovereignty, security and territorial integrity and safeguarding the interests of national development above anything else," he was quoted as saying by the official Xinhua news agency.

The Chinese president was addressing a meeting of People's Liberation Army delegates at the 10th National People's Congress, the country's top legislature.

His comments came on the eve of a meeting Monday in which the parliament is expected to pass an "anti-secession" law aimed at preventing rival Taiwan from moving towards independence.

The law gives the Chinese military the legal basis for attacking Taiwan if it moves towards independence. At the same time, Beijing insists that "non-peaceful means" will be used only as a "last resort."

China's legislature yesterday approved Chinese President Hu Jintao as the country's official military chief, marking the final step in China's first bloodless leadership transition.

Hu, 62, replaces ageing former leader Jiang Zemin, 78, as chairman of the state's Central Military Commission (CMC).

He was selected by an overwhelming 2,886 votes at a meeting of China's legislature, the National People's Congress (NPC), with six votes against and five undecided, the Xinhua news agency said.

State television CCTV showed Hu bowing to the NPC delegates after the results were announced and as delegates gave him a long round of applause.

The move Sunday was largely ceremonial and widely expected as

Travel agent

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agency had sold tickets to the Bangladeshis, but he denied the allegation.

Salam is likely to be produced before a court and placed on remand for interrogation soon.

Bomb hoax

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authorities and a team of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) with its dog squad thoroughly checked the plane to find the threat a hoax.

After searching the panicked passengers, the authorities finally approved the aircraft's take off.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Airport Police Station Hanif admitted the arrest and told The Daily Star last night, "Chisti is undergoing quizzing."

"We're examining the information he has given us during the quizzing," Hanif said but declined to give any details.

Promotion

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for promotion. The initiative however failed as 550 officers of the 1985 batch, who had also earned eligibility for promotion, created pressure to include them in the promotion list.

According to sources, currently some 1032 senior assistant secretaries, including 475 from different batches up to 1984 and those of the 1985 batch, have become eligible for promotion to the upper post. Of them, claims of around 900 officers are valid as they have fulfilled all necessary criteria.

However, the total number of posts of deputy secretary in the civil administration is 830, and there are at present only 180 posts vacant.

On February 16, 2003, the government promoted 493 senior assistant secretaries from different batches up to the 1984 batch. However, 280 officers of the 1984 batch were left out from the procedure due to shortage of posts. Sources said the government cannot elevate the junior officers now before those seniors.

Official sources said the Ministry of Establishment had prepared the list of these left-out officers. The SSB also proceeded as per the list, but a section of influential officials raised the demand for inclusion of 550 officers of the 1985 batch in the promotion list.

Officials of different batches up to 1984 blamed the 1985 batch officers for stalling their promotion and said a section of top bureaucrats, who are on contract, are basically responsible for creating this complexity. They said that they also want promotion of their juniors and the government should maintain seniority in respect of promotion.

When contacted, sources at the Prime Minister's Office said that the government has the intention to elevate the eligible officers in phases and according to the availability of vacant posts.

Hu had already succeeded Jiang in September as chairman of the Communist Party's CMC, which holds the real power over the world's largest military.

But it marks a further consolidation of power by Hu, whose rise to China's top leadership positions began in November 2002 when he replaced Jiang as secretary general of the Communist Party.

He took over from Jiang as state president in 2003.

With Sunday's appointment, Hu has taken over all of Jiang's responsibilities and has solidified his position as the head of the fourth generation of communist leadership following the revolutionary Mao Zedong, economic reformer Deng Xiaoping and Jiang.

Jiang had held the military post for 15 years, since he was hastily installed following the massacre of prodemocracy protesters on Tiananmen Square in 1989.

Like Jiang, Hu faces the handicap of having never served in the armed forces.

While Jiang skillfully won loyalty from the military by promoting supporters to key positions and advocating modernization of the armed forces, Hu looks set to pursue a similar tactic -- keeping the top brass happy by boosting their budget.

Following Hu's appointment to the party's top military post in September, Hu pledged to continue down the path of his predecessors to modernize the 2.5-million-strong People's Liberation Army.

On Monday, the largely rubber stamp legislature will approve a 12.6 percent year-on-year increase in the official military budget for this year, an NPC official said.

Analysts said while Sunday's appointment showed the transfer of positions was over, it was still too early to say whether the transfer of power itself was complete.

"I think Jiang Zemin would probably still like to have some influence and he still has some of his supporters in fairly senior positions," said Brian Bridges, a political scientist at Lingnan University in Hong Kong.

The military is one example of how Hu still must slowly cement his power.

"The process of moving his people into the military will take time because Jiang Zemin's people are still there," Bridges said, adding Hu would more likely carry out a gradual replacement of people who reach retirement age rather than a sudden overhaul of the military.

Another major challenge Hu will face is maintaining a tough stand on Taiwan, to prevent the island Beijing wants reunified from declaring formal independence.

Beijing is eager to show Taiwan separatists that China's new, younger generation of leaders will be just as determined to take back Taiwan, by force if necessary.

China's legislature on Monday is expected to pass an "anti-secession law" aimed at making it illegal under Chinese law for Taiwan to move towards independence and providing a legal basis for the mainland to attack the island if it does so.

"The fact the law comes at this early stage of his (Hu's) power, he's probably trying to show nationalists in China that he's standing up for national rights," Bridges said.

Taiwan has been ruled separately since the end of a civil war in 1949.

Shop owners

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of the Shop Owners Association.

They will also stage a candlelit demonstration in the city on March 20 in protest against the government's failure to provide all with sufficient electricity.

The government on March 9 decided to restrict power use at shopping malls and super markets from 6:00pm to 10:00pm so that household clients -- particularly the SSC examinees -- can get uninterrupted power supply.

A high-powered meeting at the Ministry of Power decided to ask operators of the city's shopping malls not to use government-supplied power during peak hours.

"We'll encourage shopping centres to immediately start the use of their own captive power during peak hours. If they don't heed the government's call, we'll stop the supply to them," Iqbal Hasan Mahmood, state minister for power, said.