

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 quit" 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 pactions on March 23 and enforce a dawn-to-dusk countrywide hartal on March 27.

IN DHAKA

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, Kairali, 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 Muktangan.

Iraq govt collapse

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Massoud Barzani was reviewing the terms with negotiators.

Barzani hinted at dissatisfaction with the deal in an interview Friday saying he wanted agreement now on Kurdish claims to the ethnically divided northern oil centre of Kirkuk.

"We do not agree on postponing this matter until after the constitution, we must agree on the issue of Kirkuk now," he told Dubai-based Al-Arabiya television.

On Saturday, a prominent Shia politician had raised hopes of an imminent agreement.

"It was decided by both sides the Kurds would get back to us tomorrow (Sunday) with their final decision and I think we'll hear something good," said Mohsen Abdel al-Hakim, whose father Abdal Aziz heads one of the main Shia factions.

The Shia alliance won 146 seats in the new 275-seat national assembly but need a two-thirds majority to approve a new government. The Kurds are comfortably the second largest faction with 77 seats.

The Kurds have been seeking an undertaking from the Shias that they will respect provisions regarding Kirkuk in an interim constitution adopted under the US-led occupation last year.

The text sets out steps to redress Saddam Hussein's expulsion of around 100,000 Kurds from Kirkuk, and also provides for a secular and federal Iraq.

Two US nationals, working for the Blackwater security firm, were killed and a third wounded in a roadside bomb blast Saturday afternoon just south of Baghdad, an embassy official said.

Blackwater, which provides security for US officials in Iraq, lost four employees in Fallujah last March. Their bodies were mutilated by an angry mob sparking a major US offensive in the city.

At least 209 foreign contractors have been killed since the 2003 US-led invasion, according to Iraq Coalition Casualty Count, an independent body that tracks coalition losses.

A US soldier was shot dead in the main northern city of Mosul late Friday, the military announced.

Twelve corpses, which had been rotting for a month, were found by the Iraqi army near Latifiyah, 30 kilometres (20 miles) south of Baghdad, a security source said.

The chief engineer at Baghdad airport, Moayad Ibrahim al-Muslah, was shot dead Saturday at his home in western Baghdad, an interior ministry official said.

A policeman was killed and

Border talks

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adjacent to Indian border. The BSF has more soldiers and vehicles than the BDR in those areas, BDR sources said.

Electrification of the barbed wire fences in several areas by the BSF was going on. They had taken initiatives to set up floodlights where it was not possible to erect barbed wire fences.

The BSF completed erection of barbed wire fences 40km along Jhenidah, 94km in Meherpur, 47km in Chuadanga and 18km in Kushtia.

At Lalmonirhat, the BSF set up 200 steel pillars to erect barbed wire fences within 150 yards of the no-man's land, BSS reports quoting villagers.

(UNB/BDNEWS/BSS)

"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."

JD 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 Ali, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim took part in the programme near Muktangan.

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.

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

"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-boys 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 reconstructive 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.

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 Quddus (40) and Mohammad Alam (45). Police sent all the four bodies to morgue.

Rajbari Police Super Matiur Rahman Sheikh claimed that six policemen were injured in the clash. UNB district correspondent said three injured police were admitted to Pashna Upazila Health Complex.

Police said they recovered two guns, two cut rifles, 17 bullets and two big daggers from the scene.

Some leaflets, pads and slips of the party were also found.

The police team fired 86 shots during the one-and-a-half-hour firefight.

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 Comilla, Aurangajeb, Mahbub said that all the nine arrestees during interrogation said that Swapna Saha brought them here. They have been staying at Plaza hotel in Laksham.

Comilla police super went to the Kotwali Police Station at around 10 am yesterday and quizzed the arrestees.

Sources said that local lawmaker Col (retired) Anwarul Azim and Swapna Saha brought the nine decorators. They came to Laksham on March 7 and started work the following day.

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.

"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 anesthesiologists. The unit has no Class IV employees which also hampers patients management. The intensive care unit virtually has no manpower to run it.

Govt done well

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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 produce.

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,

He 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-based agriculture to production of cash crops and develop agro-based industries.

The discussions 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 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.

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

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 work on any private members' bill or not. It should at least allow the private members to place their bills in parliament.

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

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."

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