

Egypt cracks down on banned group

REUTERS, Cairo

Egypt has arrested dozens of members of the banned Muslim Brotherhood and blocked the group, Egypt's largest opposition force, from holding a demonstration calling for political reform.

Thousands of riot police lined roads in central Cairo yesterday to stop demonstrators gathering for the protest in front of parliament. A few hundred of the protesters managed to regroup to hold demonstrations in other central Cairo locations.

Leading Brotherhood member Essam el-Erian told Reuters the authorities had arrested six members of the group who were trying to attend the protest and detained a further 49 of the protest organisers.

An official said the 49 men, arrested in five separate sweeps late on Saturday, were found "in possession of books and publications opposed to the system of government" and suspected of recruiting new Brotherhood members and "disturbing security".

The arrests were made in Cairo, two provinces north of the capital and in Fayoum, a one-hour drive southwest of Cairo.

A police source said senior Brotherhood member Abdel Monem Aboul Fotouh was also arrested in his office on Sunday on accusations of belonging to the group, which has been banned since 1954 but tolerated in recent years.

The Muslim Brotherhood, like

EU optimistic after Cuba visit

AP, Havana

A top European Union official said Cuban President Fidel Castro shares the bloc's interest in strengthening ties and tackling sensitive issues such as human rights and called on all parties to avoid "useless provocations."

EU development commissioner Louis Michel met with Castro as Cuba struggles with international criticism over political prisoners and an upcoming U.N. vote on the island's human rights record.

"We spoke together about all the issues, even about the difficult issues, and sensitive issues, and there is of course a common interest to relaunch a political dialogue," Michel said.

The commissioner, who was set to leave Havana on Sunday, underscored the delicate nature of EU-Cuba relations and urged all involved parties to avoid "useless provocations."

"I think the situation, the way in which we are working, remains rather fragile. It is not so easy to lead these conversations," he said. "The challenge is so important, that we have to be very prudent with any kind of useless provocations."

Cuba-EU ties have been strained for several years, primarily over the issue of human rights and political freedoms on the communist-run island. The breaking point came when the Cuban government launched a massive crackdown in 2003 that put 75 political activists behind bars, prompting the EU to impose sanctions against the island.

But a new chapter was opened

6 pvt universities

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cause notice and hope that the ministry will give us a chance," said Dr M Yusuf Ali, vice-chancellor of Green University.

"If the ministry forces us to shut down, then we have no way but to seek justice in court," he added.

Education Minister M Osman Farruk, asked to comment on the preparation by some universities to take his ministry to court, said the ministry has been following procedures in line with the Private University Act (Amended) 1998.

"Everyone has the right to seek justice," the minister added.

The judicial probe body of Justice M Fazlul Huq submitted a 43-page report to the ministry in January that recommended closure of at least seven universities on grounds of their extreme failure to fulfil criteria.

The ministry on November 2 formed the committee with the retired judge of the Supreme Court to probe the allegations levelled against eight private universities by the committee that University Grants Commission (UGC) had formed.

Article 16 (1) of the Act suggests formation of such a judicial body if there are allegations against these high-level academic institutions, education ministry officials said.

Earlier, the high-powered evaluation committee looked into the performance of 52 private universities and found seven gross irregularities that include low educational standard, temporary and overcrowded campuses, false statements of students and teachers and almost total lack of administration at eight universities.

The committee, headed by UGC Chairman Prof M Asaduzzaman, in

its report submitted to the prime minister recommended the government close down the eight universities.

The education ministry, following directives from the prime minister, constituted the committee amid widespread allegations of poor quality of education at several private universities and their non-compliance with the UGC rules.

The high-powered committee found that these universities had launched business and enrolled students in departments without UGC approval.

They were also guilty of submitting false statements to the committee about their faculty members -- both the full- and part-timers -- and their salary structures, said the probe committee in its report.

During inspection of the universities, the committee members found that none of the part-time teachers had no-objection certificates from their main employers. Also, they found no existence of the mandatory reserved funds, said the report.

The universities also enrolled students in undergraduate courses before they had obtained higher secondary examination certificates, which is a clear violation of the circular of the education ministry.

These universities do not have adequate space as stipulated in the Private University Act and they have failed to have their own campuses within five years of their establishment.

The probe body recommended, however, that the BGC Trust University be given some time as it has some students and adequate infrastructure.

FBI visit

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Of the total 10 charge-sheeted in the case, who are mostly BNP men, eight are confined to the Habiganj prison.

The investigators had a probing look at Zilaneer Sawmill close to the Boilder Bazar Government Primary School ground, the spot of the grenade attack. In the sawmill, the main suspect, BNP leader Qaiyum, had reportedly held a meeting before.

It is learnt that the US investigating team will stay in Habiganj till March 29.

In the grenade attack on Awami League meeting at Boilder Bazar, Kibria and four others were killed.

Ishaq passes away

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BNP central office at Naya Paltan at 11:00am.

He will be laid to rest after a third namaz-e-janaza on Narsingdi College ground.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia expressed deep shock at the lawmaker's death, saying the nation has lost an experienced and skilled legislator.

In a condolence message, she recalled his devotion and honesty in politics, prayed for salvation of his departed soul and conveyed sympathy to the bereaved family.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar and Deputy Speaker Akhter Hamid Siddiqui in separate messages also expressed deep shock at his death.

UNB adds: The prime minister paid her last respect to Ishaq on the MP hostel premises by placing a wreath on his body.

The speaker, deputy speaker and PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury were present.

President Iajuddin Ahmed in a message expressed deep sorrow at Ishaq's death, recalling his "long experience in politics and contributions as a lawmaker".

Delhi

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Bangladeshi," he was quoted as having said.

Khan said India-Bangladesh trade and transit issues were addressed in the context of "the same agreement" on the three-nation overland pipeline project.

Dhaka would like the transit arrangements to facilitate trade between Nepal and Bhutan on one side and Bangladesh on the other be "honoured and practised" by India fully, he said.

Asked about Bangladesh's apparent reluctance to sell its own natural gas to India, Khan said, "We cannot go hungry and give away our rice. Similarly, we cannot give away the gas unless we know what is our reserve."

"Now the production well is being drilled and we are in the process of finding the actual reserve," the foreign minister told the Indian daily.

Khan said Bangladesh has already allowed the Tatas to invest in Dhaka to help it "export gas with value addition", adding that the assumption was about the availability of "surplus gas" in Bangladesh in the future.

On the issue of fencing along India-Bangladesh border, Khan said, "Neither ... should act unilaterally when there is a bilateral agreement that no defence barrier or structure be raised by either side within 150 yards from the zero line."

He called for dialogue between India and Bangladesh on the issue. He said, "not even a fraction of the fullest potential" for bilateral cooperation had yet been realised.

Ctg lawyers

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against the law minister or the communications minister for publicly opposing the Supreme Court directive for separation of the judiciary.

Though lawyers always have full respect and regards for the judgement of the court, the recent verdict accusing the journalists of contempt of court have roused concerns among the lawyers as well as the common people, they said.

They also expressed the fear that the verdict might hamper freedom of press and thereby pose a threat to the hard-earned democracy of the country.

Advocates Abu Mohammad Hashem, AKM Sirajul Islam Chowdhury, Mujibul Haq, Manatosh Barua, Ashoke Das and Mohammad Ali Chowdhury addressed the rally conducted by Advocate Rana Dasgupta.

Mahila Parishad leader Noorjahan Khan and cultural activist Al Noman extended solidarity with the lawyers' programme.

India chase 383

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sharing in a 53-run stand with Anil Kumble (22) after Danish Kaneria bagged five wickets to reduce India to 396 for nine.

It was Kaneria's 10th five-wicket haul in his 26th match.

HC issues

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Chhatra Dhara, student wing of Gono Forum, its President Mahfuz Akram and General Secretary Mohammad Rashed who was also an examinee.

In the petition they said a general diary was filed with Ramna Police Station regarding the leak out of the question paper half an hour before the start of the examination. Reports were published in different newspapers on the leak out.

Dr Kamal Hossain and barrister Abu Khaled Al Mamun moved for the petitioners.

UNSC SEAT European parliament against German bid France backs Japan

AFF, Berlin

The European Parliament is opposed to giving Germany a new permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, as part of a reform of the world organization, according to a German member of the European Union legislature, the Sunday newspaper Welt am Sonntag reported.

Having Germany a permanent member "would be an obstacle to the prospects for a European seat" on an enlarged Security Council, said Armin Laschet, a German Christian-Democratic member of the parliament in Strasbourg, who is in charge of relations with the UN.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on March 21 unveiled proposed reforms to the world body.

One of the most sensitive ideas was to expand the Security Council, with Annan offering two models. One option would add six new members to its current five permanent powers: Britain, China, France, Russia and the United States.

The other would add a third tier of semi-permanent members to the council, the top UN body for international peace and security.

Germany, Japan, India and Brazil have launched a joint bid for permanent seats, arguing that the current Security Council set-up, which dates from the immediate post-World War II era, was out-

Over 2,000 illegal

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while General Secretary Ghulam Mostafa and other leaders responded to questions from the newsmen.

Illegal travel agents and intelligence agencies working at Zia International Airport might be involved in human trafficking but none of the genuine travel agencies were involved in such malpractice, they said.

The Atab leaders demanded making Atab membership mandatory for all travel agents, which would help in taking legal action against illegal activities by any agents and bringing transparency in the sector.

Out of 1667 agents registered with the government, only 850 are Atab members, they said.

Most of the illegal travel agencies are located in Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet districts, Atab leaders said, adding that in Sylhet, the travel agency business has reached to the upazila level.

Many of them do not have any trade licence, let alone travel agency licence, they said, adding that issuing licences without consid-

ering the educational and business background of the persons concerned is responsible for the mushrooming of travel agencies in the country.

Atab President Mohaimen said although a high powered meeting chaired by the civil aviation minister decided to make the Atab membership mandatory for all travel agents, it was suspended by another meeting chaired by the secretary of the same ministry.

Following the Mediterranean and Mauritania tragedies, indiscriminate police actions have created panic among the genuine travel agents, said Atab General Secretary Ghulam Mustafa.

He demanded an end to such action.

Atab's 15-point demands to the government include closing down all the illegal travel agents, regular monitoring of activities of genuine travel agents, considering educational background while issuing new licences, ending harassment of passengers at the airports and ending police harassment of the genuine agents.

Jail for reckless

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misbehave with passengers, he will be punished with imprisonment.

The ministry also proposes to increase the lowest fine from Tk 200 to Tk 500 and providing for fines up to Tk 1,000 to 1,500 for different transport-related crimes.

The move is aimed at ensuring road safety and smooth passenger service, establishing discipline in the transport sector and preventing noise pollution, sources said, adding the draft of the amended ordinance will be tabled before the cabinet soon for approval before its enactment.

Communications Secretary M Shaiful Islam, Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) Chairman Faruque Ahmed and high officials of the ministry attended the meeting.

ROAD HAZARDS

Reckless and drunk driving, overloading vehicles and their lack of fitness contribute to most of the road accidents in the country that kill about 7,000 to 10,000 people every year, according to a survey report of Institute of Child and Mother Health.

According to BRTA Road Safety Cell, the annual fatality rate in road accident in Bangladesh is 85.6 per cent of 100,000 vehicles, followed by 62.7 in Nepal and 47.7 in Myanmar.

Another study said about 53 percent road accident victims are pedestrians and of them one-third are males between 21 and 40 years. Of the road mishaps, about 60 percent occur on national and regional highways and 40 percent on city roads.

Accidents on national highways are more severe with 73 percent of them being fatal, which is 42 percent in case of city road mishaps.

Poor enforcement of traffic laws, lack of driving training and test, weak publicity on road safety issues and lack of vehicle fitness and medical services for road accident victims are the main causes of the high fatality, the study found.

It said 58 percent of the accidents in Bangladesh are caused due to human faults, 34 percent due to bad road condition and 8 percent due to lack of vehicle fitness.

The overall national damage in

5 Garos hurt in attack of extortionists

BDNEWS, Tangail

Five members of an aboriginal Garo family were injured at Bagadoba village in Madhupur when a gang of criminals attacked their house Saturday.

The injured were identified as Sadhan, 12, Sabitri, 40, Mishel, 45, and Monjila, 55.

According to police and locals, the criminals numbering 30 to 35, including Anthony, Jinen, Zinnah, Mimi, Mithil, Robin, Rahima and Pranay, and equipped with rods and wooden sticks stormed and ransacked the house of Sabitri Hagid at around 12 noon following their refusal to pay up toll.

The criminals beat up the family members mercilessly.

Acase was filed in this connection.

Section 144 in Tangail

BDNEWS, Tangail

Police yesterday clamped Section 144 in Tangail as tension gripped the town over calling of rallies by two feuding groups at a same venue.

Police and local sources said Jamilur Rahman Miron, pourasabha chairman, protested construction of some structures by local BNP leader Sanwar Hossain on a plot at Pach Ani Bazar allegedly grabbed from a neighbour.

Local people thrashed Sanwar after he had attacked the chairman, sources said.

Following the incident, Sanwar and the chairman called meetings at the same venue triggering tension.

However, no-one could hold rally following the imposition of Section 144.

Ex-Bac director

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would carry out the duties of the ACC director taskforce (Chittagong) and director taskforce (Comilla).

The ACC has no such posts as its organogram is yet to be formulated. But Bac had such posts and the government had transferred the directors after Bac was dissolved on formation of the ACC on November 21 last year.

While issuing Thursday's order, Hannan referred to two Bac office orders of 1999 and 2000 and said it was a 'correction' of the two office orders. He mentioned that he has approval from the ACC chairman in this regard.

In January when the ACC decided to attach all Bac staff temporarily to the commission flouting the government order, Hannan started issuing office orders to transfer Bac officials to other Bac positions and assigning their duties.

Hannan issued the transfer order of eight former Bac staff on March 17 that irked the Cabinet Division. On March 21, the division sent a letter to the commission saying the Bac staff are now the government's reserved employees accountable to the division.

The Cabinet Division made it clear that the Bac staff are not allowed to work with the ACC until a screening is done.

Mosharraf

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the Bangladesh government's decision regarding gas export.

The country can produce up to 20 percent more gas than its current demand, the minister said adding, "The government will be able to expand the gas lines to Jessore and Khulna via Rajshahi under an Asian Development Bank (ADB) project. The project, which involves an investment of Tk 419 million, is expected to increase the local gas purchase rate."

Besides, the necessity for exporting gas will come down further once the Myanmar gas line is installed, he added.

Rajuk officials

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check building designs, some owners still show designs signed by the three. So, we guess they are continuing signing faulty designs on backdates violating the building code," said the chairman.

"We, however, don't know yet what really is happening," he said adding that inadequate manpower does not allow them to check out design of every single structure.

When contacted, ATM Quamruzzaman, one of the terminated officers, denied the allegation, and said it was totally fabricated.

"I left the design section in 1999, and was sacked from Rajuk in July 2003. How can I still have the authority to pass designs, and who would come to me for this purpose," he questioned.

Referring to his termination and the missing of about 200 files, he said that he was cornered, and the action [disciplinary] against him was politically motivated.

"When I left the design section I handed over the charge to someone else. Nobody raised any question at that time, but later in 2003 they sacked me for file grafting. It is simply ridiculous," he said.

"It needs an approval from the building committee to pass a design and the authorised officer alone cannot pass that," he added.

One Rajuk official said it is hard to confirm whether the suspected designs were signed during the service periods of those three or not.

ATM Quamruzzaman was sacked in July 2003 while Asaduzzaman and Ziaul Haq in June and December 2002.

SC rejects

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11.30pm on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF) in a press statement blamed armed cadres of the Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS) for the abduction.

In the press statement, UPDF Rangamat district convener Sachib Chakma strongly protested the incident and demanded measures for immediate release of the abducted people.

7 indigenous

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11 killed, 17 hurt in Kashmir

REUTERS, Srinagar

Suspected militants shot dead a grandmother, mother and her infant daughter after the child's father, a former Kashmiri separatist rebel, surrendered to Indian security forces, police said yesterday.

They then set the house on fire before fleeing, a police spokesman said.

Militants often attack families of police and army informers in the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, where separatists have waged a revolt against Indian rule since 1989.

Police had no further details on the killings of the three, which happened in Udhampur district, in the south of the state.

Seventeen people were also wounded when militants lobbed a grenade at a security bunker near a crowded bus stand in Srinagar,

Kashmir's summer capital. The grenade missed the target and exploded on the road injuring 17 pedestrians.

India and Pakistan, which both claim Kashmir, India's only Muslim-majority state, have begun a tentative peace process after fighting three wars and coming to the brink of a fourth over the disputed Himalayan region.

But violence has continued within the region despite the peace process.

In other incidents, suspected rebels shot dead four people while two civilians were beheaded by rebels across the region. Soldiers shot dead two senior members of Kashmir's frontline rebel group, Hizbul Mujahideen, in separate shootouts.

Officials say more than 45,000 people have been killed in the revolt.

Orphans bear brunt of Nepal's brutal war

REUTERS, Nepal

Seven-year-old Sinam sits cross-legged on her bed, revising for her maths exam. When a stranger enters, the other orphanage girls jump up, press their hands together and say "Namaste, uncle" in unison.

But spiky-haired Sinam hardly stirs. Winnie the Pooh's face smiles from the front of her dungarees, but her brown eyes are full of sadness.

Two-and-a-half-years ago, Sinam's mother was shot dead by the Nepali army, allegedly for violating a curfew in the countryside.

Her father became an alcoholic, and she ended up here, at a small home for orphans of Nepal's nine-year Maoist revolt in the southern town of Nepalgunj. She has food, shelter and friends.

But she looks completely lost.

More than 8,000 children have lost one or both parents since Maoists took up arms in 1996 to topple the monarchy and establish a communist republic, rights groups say. At least 375 children have died, killed by either side.

"Childhood should not be a time of fear," said UNICEF's Suomi Sakai. "Children write to us that they are scared they will be abducted, scared they will be beaten or killed, scared that they will be blown up, and too scared to go to school."

On a recent trip to the Maoist heartland of Nepal, a Reuters team saw children scarcely more than 10 years old carrying rifles, members of a Maoist village militia. Locals said children as young as 14 or 15 are recruited into the Maoists' frontline fighting force, the "People's Liberation Army".

In a mud-walled rethouse high in the Himalayan foothills, a teacher sat under a single gas light and told of life under the Maoists, who control much of rural Nepal. For 90 minutes, he did not smile once.

"Parents are scared about their children," he said. "Once they go to school, they don't know when they will come back or what will happen to them."

The teacher said Maoists came to his school almost every month and took children off for several days of indoctrination. Others are asked to join the militia forces, or to work as porters or messengers.

Teachers say Maoists plan to introduce their own curriculum, and have already forced rural schools to observe a minute's silence at morning assembly instead of singing the Nepali anthem.

Ironically, those teachers in Maoist areas are still paid by the government. Normally, they are asked to pay five

percent "tax" to the rebels, except when the Maoists come on a "emergency fundraising" drive -- and ask for an entire month's pay.

Teachers are often threatened and intimidated by the rebels, and thousands have fled rural schools, many of which have closed.

UNICEF says one in five Nepali children between six and 10, or more than half a million children, do not attend school, and only three out of five actually complete primary education.

The Sahara orphanage in Nepalgunj is run on a shoe-string, relying mostly on donations from local businessmen.

Eight to 10 children share a bedroom, often two to a bed. The walls are decorated with pages from newspapers, shelves meant for the children's possessions almost bare.

Side by side, victims of the security forces eat, sleep and play with the victims of the Maoist rebels.

"We were surprised by the children's relationships with each other," said volunteer Bal Krishna Joshi.

"One child whose father was killed by Maoists, another whose father was killed by security forces, they have a very good relationship, like brothers."

Many here have lost their fathers, their mothers reluctantly surrendering them to the home because they cannot find work to support them. Joshi says the home also helps mothers get back on their feet financially, through income generation schemes, so that they can one day take their children back.

"It is like a transit home," he said. "It is important to reintegrate the children."

In the next bed to Sinam is 10-year-old Hira Pariyar. Her father was killed by the police in 1996, just a month after the Maoist revolt began. Her mother married again, and left Hira and her brother Krishna to fend for themselves.

She was just two, he was five. Together, they left the countryside and headed for the nearest town, Liwang, in the mountains of mid-western Nepal. For two years, Krishna worked crushing stones, supporting both for just a few cents a day.

Eventually, the district administration sent Hira to the orphans' home in Nepalgunj. Krishna stayed behind, and has returned to an uncle's house in the countryside.

"I want to be a nurse, to serve the country," said Hira, with a shy smile. Asked who she most wants to meet, she says simply: "My brother".

Khaleda calls to resist

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consideration of the government.

She said the interest rate of the BRDB loan for freedom fighters would be reduced from 11 to 8 percent and assured that the provision of 30 percent quota for employment of the freedom fighters' children will be fully implemented.

Khaleda said a housing project for the martyrs as well as injured survivors of the Liberation War has been taken up in capital's Mirpur area.

The freedom fighters would be provided with ID cards after the list of real freedom fighters is completed, the PM said adding that the list is being published through gazette after scrutiny by a neutral committee already formed.

Some other steps taken by the government included raising the monthly honorarium to a freedom fighter to Tk 500 from Tk 300, raising the number of their beneficiaries to 60,000 from 41,000. Also the amounts of state honorarium given to injured war veterans were raised to Tk 8,000 from the previous amount varying from Tk 2,000 to Tk 6,000 per month.

Already the families of martyrs and injured freedom fighters were exempted from paying gas bills. They were also given exemption of

paying electricity bills not exceeding 200 units, the PM said, adding arrangement has also been made so that the widows of freedom fighters can enjoy the honorarium allowance during their lifetime and receive free treatment in government hospitals.

She said a number of projects have been taken up to project the history of the independence war to future generation including build up monument at the graveyard of seven Birshresthas, monument in districts inscribing the name of freedom fighters, and construction of memorial complex at Kalurghat in Chittagong.

On the independence monument at Suhrawardy Udyan, Khaleda said despite the ongoing investigation on alleged irregularities, instruction had been given to finish its construction work.

LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, PM's Political Secretary Harris Chowdhury, State Minister for Liberation War Affairs Prof Mohammad Rezaul Karaim, Chairman of BMCCC Kabir Ahmed Khan and Secretary General Shah Alam Chowdhury, among others, addressed the meet moderated by Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar.