

Another bout of hartal

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ponement of HSC examinations. Police yesterday evening clubbed a pre-hartal procession of Awami Jubo League at city's Zero Point area leaving at least 30 Jubo League activists including its chairman Jahangir Kabir Nanok injured.

The 11-party and Jatya Oikya Mancha—two major allies of the AL—however, did not extend their support in favour of today's hartal.

Earlier, the Jatya Oikya Mancha at its steering committee meeting held at the Workers' Party office on Thursday had urged the AL to reconsider its decision of enforcing another dawn-to-dusk shutdown considering the plight of the 4 lakh HSC examinees. The meeting also decided not to extend its support in favour of today's hartal.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education has postponed today's HSC examinations under seven education boards due to hartal. Dhaka University and National

University have also postponed all their examinations scheduled for today.

The AL and its front organisations have made all-out preparations to make today's hartal a success. The AL Dhaka city unit exchanged views with different professional groups and held meetings at different thana and ward units during the last few days.

To drum up support in favour of today's general strike, the AL and its front organisations yesterday brought out processions in the city and many other areas of the country. AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil issued a statement yesterday urging the people to make today's hartal a success.

The government has also taken up measures to maintain law and order during the 12-hour hartal including assigning a joint force of around 5,000 police, BDR and ansar personnel in the capital to contain any untoward incidents.

Too feeble to speak out

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her parents. She could only say that she has four sisters, all of whom were forced to work as domestic helps in the city, while their jobless father and mother stay at their village home with her two younger brothers.

TRIALS OF MEENA Not far from Pakhi's bed, Meena is living the same nightmare. The police admitted the 8-year-old domestic help to the hospital on May 8.

Neighbours told the police over telephone that her employer, Aleya Begum, and an elderly domestic help, Mosammat Nayan, tortured Meena at a house at Sutrapur.

"Aleya and Nayan both beat me up that day. I could not walk. Then the police rescued me from the house and brought me here," said the ruthlessly abused child.

Sutrapur police arrested Aleya and Nayan, filed a case under the Women and Children Repression Prevention Act and then sent them to jail.

Meena's story highlights the many dangers faced by young girls sent into domestic work. Meena's family was so poor that her mother offered her a year ago to one of her aunts, Ayesha Begum, who lived at the city's Sayedabad.

But Meena got lost once when Ayesha sent her shopping and was unable to find her way back home. It was then that Nayan picked her up and took her to Aleya's house, where the abuses on her began.

Beatings were a routine in that house, Meena described. "Whenever Nayan was alone at home, she would compel me to work continuously and would hit me with hot rod if I made any mistake," she said, adding Aleya also beat her frequently.

Like Pakhi, Meena's recovery in the hospital is but the beginning of a new challenge to face. Meena does not know her home district and could only tell The Daily Star that she has three sisters and a brother.

"Tortured at so early an age, these girls have become very weak and mentally unbalanced," one of the physicians at DMCH One-Stop Crisis Centre (OCC) said. "I don't know what their fate will be after they are treated here, because none

of their relatives has come to inquire after them," he added.

REFUGEE FOUND Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association took Pakhi to its Agargaon shelter home on Tuesday, while Sutrapur police took Meena to safe custody on Thursday. Sub-inspector Abul Khair received her from the OCC.

Doctors at the OCC on Thursday said the two hapless children are now physically well. What they need now are shelter and care. Though they have recovered from the physical wounds, they face a tougher challenge now -- finding their way back to their home and family.

Hasina

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Hasina said Advocate Khorshed Alam Bachchu was gunned down in broad daylight, but the government could not arrest the killers. "Doesn't it mean the government has hands behind the killing?"

She urged people to observe today's hartal to protest the political killings.

The opposition leader also criticised the government for "re-sorting to repression on women" during the anti-government protests and hartals. "Being linked with Jamaat, BNP has intensified its torture on women," she said.

Rejecting the government's claim of improving the law and order, Hasina said Rab, Cobra and Cheeta were raised by spending crores of taka, but innocent people like Mafizul Islam Dud Mia, a leader of Meghna upazila Awami League, were killed.

Hasina accused the government of preparing a list of AL leaders and workers and handing it over to Rab for killing them in 'crossfire'. She called for protecting the country and the people from the "misrule of the alliance government."

Hasina, who distributed awards among the winners of the children's drawing competition, said the new generation must know the true history of Bangladesh.

Prof Salahuddin Ahmed presided over the function.

Surge in investments

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Besides, export players foresee future benefits of sticking to Bangladesh. The country is currently lobbying for duty free access to the US market, and there is a good chance of winning in this bid. Secondly, Bangladesh has duty free access to Australia -- but has not yet tapped its potentials because this facility is tagged with a condition of "rules of origin". To fulfil this condition, Bangladesh must be fully equipped with the backward linkage industry and get the upphand.

Presently China is beating Bangladesh in garments exports (and other products as well) due to its unusually low price. "But export players are aware that China is controlling their prices by artificially devaluing their currency against the dollar. Presently their currency is 40 percent devalued. Sooner or later, China will have to free their currency. When it does that, their prices will jump up accordingly -- giving Bangladesh the upphand," the Bepza chairman noted.

This is also why Chinese investors themselves are also coming to Bangladesh, he added. "About 40 percent of our garments sector linkage items are imported from China. As this is a huge earning for China, they want to move these linkage industries to Bangladesh to retain their sales," he added.

"Overall, the EPZs' productivity remains very high because these are not affected by hartals and labour unrest. Sixty-nine percent of the employees are women," the chairman points out.

The Bepza targeted 1.5 billion dollars of export earning in the current fiscal. By March, it fetched 1.2 billion dollars. "We are set to exceed the target," he quips, "and as more units are coming up, we aim at fetching 3 billion dollars in the next fiscal."

"Even the existing investors are expanding their units because of their business boom," the chairman quips.

short-term measure. But there should be a long term solution."

Investors also express their concerns about shortcomings in the country's infrastructure. "We see a grim power supply scenario in the coming years because the government could not initiate any major power projects in the last three years," notes an investor of a joint venture company, requesting anonymity.

Bepza public relations manager Nazma Binte Alamgir says, since the government in the last fiscal year announced 30 percent cash incentives for agro processing units centred around the Iswardi EPZ, a large number of investors tilted to agro processing units.

"The foreign investors also seek this incentive. We believe such ventures have good potential. In the north Bengal, huge supplies of bananas or mangoes rot due to lack of proper storage. Once agro processing units come online, the north Bengal farmers will get their full benefit," Nazma added.

The country's first EPZ, set up in Chittagong in 1983, now has 121 units and the Dhaka EPZ set up in 1993 has 76 units.

The other EPZs set up after 2001 have only a few units -- the Mongla EPZ has 10 units, the Comilla EPZ 7 units, and the Syedpur and Iswardi EPZs only 1 unit each.

These EPZs combined fetched 9.57 billion dollars since their inception and are currently employing 1.51 lakh people.

Other than garment related industries, these have electronics, footwear, metal products, chemicals and other types of units.

Among these, South Korea has 56 units, Bangladesh 51, Japan 22, China and Hong Kong 22, US and UK 10 each, India 8, Taiwan 7, Malaysia 5, Germany 4, Pakistan 4, the Netherlands 3, and one each for Thailand, Switzerland, Panama, Denmark, Italy, Belgium. There are several joint ventures which include Australian and Canadian investors.

Among the new investors, who represent the aforementioned countries, there will also be Ireland, Singapore and Nepal.

The EPZs attract investors as they offer a 10-year tax holiday and duty free import of export raw materials.

One killed

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eye-witnesses said. Identity of the victim aged about 45 could not be known.

Seventeen of the injured were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College and Hospital (MMCH). Thirteen of them were identified as Shaifu, 22, his wife Rahima, 20, Madan, Gani 30, Raisuddin, 45, Amena, 25, Abdullah, 30, Fulbanu, 43, all hailing from Netrokona district, Razib, 20, from Mymensingh, Joyntal, 22, from Jamalpur, Kadir, 60, from Phulpur in Mymensingh, Nazma, 20, Lalon, 25, and Abeda, 25.

Condition of five were stated to be critical, hospital sources said. The running train hit the bus in its front side when the bus got on the railway track through the open crossing, locals said, adding that the gatekeeper had left the place during nor'wester with heavy downpour.

Hearing the screaming of the bus passengers, locals rushed to the spot and sent the injured to the MMCH.

Police took the bus under their custody. The body was sent to MMCH morgue for autopsy.

Despite repeated attempts, the stationmaster of Mymensingh Railway Station could not be contacted after the accident.

MoU today

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MA Awal at the BTMA conference room.

Chinese investors can enjoy the GSP (generalised system of preference) facility of Bangladesh while we can get benefit from their technological advancement, said the BTMA president.

China is facing safeguard restriction from the two biggest export markets --USA and European Union.

On the other hand, Bangladesh is enjoying GSP facility of the EU countries.

Sylhet blasts

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May 21, grenade blast on a car shortly after an AL meeting at Gulshan Hotel on August 5, and twin blasts in two theatres two days later.

Yet another bomb attack of 2004 took place on December 24 at the residence of former AL lawmaker and district women's AL President Syeda Zebunnesa Haque that left eight women leaders including Zebunnesa seriously wounded.

All the blasts caused death of 11, including a sub-inspector (SI) of the police, one AL leader, one AL activist and a street urchin.

The investigators, however, claimed on different occasions that their probe was in progress.

Five of the cases filed with the Kotwal Police Station in connection with the blasts were transferred to the CID for investigation. However, only one CID officer was tasked with the probe into four incidents.

Investigation officer (IO) Munshi Atiqur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday that investigation into the twin cinema blasts is almost complete. "I will submit the charge-sheet very soon," he said.

"But probes into the grenade blasts at the Shah Jalal Shrine and Gulshan Hotel incident will take more time," he said adding that the nature of these attacks were also serious.

The CID failed to make any headway into the January 12 blast at the Shah Jalal Shrine that killed five people. Police arrested at least 50 in connection with the incident, but are yet to find any clue.

The May 21 grenade attack killed three people including SI Kamal Uddin and injured 70 others including the British high commissioner.

Police picked up about 30 persons but found no significant information. Four months after the incident, investigators from the Scotland Yard visited the shrine several times and probed into the incident. Munshi Atiq, the IO of this case, travelled to Singapore and London to quiz an under-treatment man who had sustained injuries from the blast.

The grenade blast at the Gulshan Hotel, which took place minutes after the departure of city Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran after an AL meeting on August 7, killed city AL public secretary Mohammad Ibrahim Ali and hurt 30 others.

The CID interrogated and took statement of some 60 people including AL leaders, besides interrogating expatriate AL leader SM Nunu Miah. Nunu was later released after intervention of British MP Oona King.

Street urchin Shahad, 11, was killed in one of the twin blasts at the entrance to a city cinema hall on August 5.

Police are probing the two other cases.

RU violence

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Zahid Hasan Milky said the authority was not inclined to advance further over the incident as all in the meeting described it as "a minor incident."

Asked about the bomb blasts and recovery of a bag full of cocktails, Milky said if those crackers were used, the incident might have turned into a severe one.

Meanwhile, the sub-inspector of the Mithorai Police Station filed a case under the explosives act accusing Sirajul Islam, an outsider from Meherchandi area, who was arrested from the campus with the bag filled with six cocktails.

Blaming the violence on the administration some senior teachers said the fostering of terrorists by the administration would result in an unpleasant situation.

Both the feuding groups who engaged in sporadic clashes on the campus over domination in their workers' council at the Quazi Nazrul Islam auditorium on Thursday staged separate showdowns on the campus yesterday.

However, no untoward incident was reported.

Extra-judicial killings

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"Probe into all the deaths will be conducted and action will be taken against the members if found guilty," LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, chairman of the committee, told reporters after a meeting of the committee.

State Minister for Home Lutfozzaman Babar said orders had already been given to law enforcers, especially Rab men, for carefully carrying out investigations before they capture or arrest anyone. "Executive action will be taken if any innocent person is arrested, harassed or punished," he said.

But no one responsible for the killings have been brought to book, as the government remains totally indifferent to rights organisations' outcry against the killings and demand for ensuring people's right to be tried in the court for any crime.

"NO RIGHT FOR CRIMINALS" The government defends the law-enforcers' actions by saying the people killed in such 'crossfire' and 'encounters' were criminals and criticised those expressing concerns over the extra-judicial killings.

"Criminals cannot have any human rights," Babar said at the end of last year, adding that the tough stance of the police and Rab has earned them people's support and that the law enforcers had harassed no innocent people.

He slammed the human-rights organisations for criticising death of criminals in 'crossfire'. "When criminals are being killed in encounters, human-rights organisations speak out. But when policemen get killed by the criminals, no one speaks about human rights," Babar said at Rab's first anniversary programme on March 26.

The state minister said the law-enforcers fired in self-defence, but records do not show any of them having received any major injuries during the operations that caused such a large number of deaths.

According to Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, the criminals are dying when Rab men are opening fire to protect themselves from their armed attacks. He argues that Rab has no alternative to opening fire; firstly, to save themselves and, secondly, to keep the arrested criminals in their control.

POLICE RULE The Police Regulations of Bengal (PRB) say firearms should not be used other than in emergency situations.

The PRB says use of firearms will be applicable in three cases -- for self-protection and possession of property, for foiling illegal gathering and, in some cases, for making arrest. It mandates a full executive probe by the deputy commissioner, district magistrate, additional district magistrate, superintendent of police (SP) or additional SP for justification of use of firearms.

According to the PRB, the investigators are to send reports to the government and submit a copy to the SP or range deputy inspector general for sending it to the inspector general of police (IGP).

VERSIONS OF POLICE AND RAB HEADS

Although Rab, which launched formal operations on June 21 last year, sent an ominous chill through social veins by such killings, the police and their specially trained forces Cheetah and Cobra also came up with similar attacks and shortly surpassed Rab.

According to rights bodies, 270 people have died in police and 115 in Rab actions since June 2004 to April this year and 23 more were killed in last 18 days in 'shootouts', but Rab puts the figure at only 83.

IGP Abdul Quayum said on May 12 he did not have reports of fault of any policemen in such 'encounters' that led to any of these deaths.

"Executive inquiries have been done into most of such incidents. But, till date, I don't have any report that anyone died because of the fault of the policemen," he told The Daily Star.

"Whenever any encounter takes place, the district magistrate applies the rule to conduct an executive inquiry, instructions are already there."

Asked whether the police are conducting any investigation into such incidents, the IGP said: "The police cannot run such investigation. Since they are a party to such incidents, the PRB (Police Regulations of Bengal) stipulates investigation by a neutral authority, that is, a magistrate."

Rab sources, meanwhile, said a full executive probe is being conducted into 58 of 61 incidents of use of firearms. The additional divisional commissioners are carrying investigations into six incidents and the district magistrates into 35, while the SPs and magistrates are doing the remaining probes. Reports of 35 investigations have already been sent and nothing 'negative' was there against the Rab men.

"There is a legal provision of probe into use of firearms and investigations are going on according to the law," Rab Director General Abdul Aziz Sarker told reporters last week. Rab itself is conducting a departmental inquiry beside the executive investigations, he added.

EXCUSE The same old story of the victims' getting arrested and killed in 'crossfire' or 'encounter' or 'shoot-out' during operations for retrieval of illegal firearms and arrest of criminals at deserted places, mostly in the small hours, has become a cliché.

Police and Rab authorities send to newspaper offices press releases in the same format, with changes in the details of victims

and 'recovered' firearms. The releases keep claiming that the victims died when his accomplices opened fire on the law-enforcers to snatch him or the victims tried to flee.

"CAPITAL PUNISHMENT WITHOUT TRIAL" Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain has identified deaths in 'crossfire' as extra-judicial executions that are in flagrant violation of the constitution and the international human rights convention, to which Bangladesh is a signatory.

"The law says minimum force should be applied for arresting a person. We should see whether proper law is applied since people are dying during arrests," he said and emphasised a proper probe into the deaths "as everyone has the right to seek trial."

Former chief justice and chief adviser to caretaker government Muhammad Habibur Rahman said at a seminar recently: "The law and order men would have been more cautious if a report on every death in 'crossfire' was asked for since the first such incident occurred."

Protesting the extra-judicial acts involving deaths, United Nations Special Rapporteur Asma Jahangir said "Although the government is trying to justify the extra-judicial killings here in the context of a grim picture of law and order, the police have become more and more unaccountable and corrupt with such power, and there is no rule of law."

Human-rights activist and legal expert Shahdeen Malik recently said: "Reports quite clearly indicate that purported crossfire did not take place, persons concerned were killed in a different manner."

"In any country with minimum respect for the rule of law, the law-enforcement personnel concerned certainly would have been suspended and proceedings by a judicial body would have been initiated immediately. This sort of killing would have certainly stopped after second or third such instance."

Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) protested the government decision on only executive probes into the extra-judicial killings and reiterated its demand for a judicial probe for the sake of neutral and legal investigation.

The SCBA leaders have dismissed the government decision as 'mere eyewitness' and an 'ill attempt to suppress the facts'. They say the decision was taken in the face of protests and condemnations from home and abroad.

"While the administration is supporting each killing through press notes, the decision on the executive probe is nothing but a merely childish one and an ill attempt to fool conscious people of Bangladesh as well as the world," says a joint statement by SCBA President Mahubay Alam and its Secretary Enayetur Rahim.

Senior Supreme Court lawyer Dr M Zahir says executive inquiries are not enough. "Any inquiry whether at the instance of the cabinet committee or the SCBA should have representation of the journalists whose job is to investigate and find out the truth."

He maintained that the inquiry committee must be independent and journalists should sit on it. But he has reservations about a purely judicial inquiry. "It is because judges are not good at investigation."

US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs Christina Rocca said at a press conference in Dhaka on May 12 that incidents of crossfire are not acceptable to the US government.

"The US government wants to see that Bangladesh has taken initiatives to bring to trial those involved in such extra-judicial killings," she told the government.

The state minister for home was not available yesterday for comment on the demand for a judicial probe.

Khorshed

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law affairs secretary of Dhaka city AL, was gunned down in city's Tejaon area by unknown assailants while he was on the way to his office on May 17.

Kabir received the docket of the case yesterday from the former IO Sub-Inspector Giasuddin of Tejaon Police Station. Earlier on May 18, the case was transferred to DB.

The IO yesterday visited the spot and met Jahan Akhtar, the complainant.

"Jahan could not talk much as she has been ill since the incident," Shahin, Jahan's sister, said yesterday. When asked if an intra-party feud resulted in her brother-in-law's murder, Shahin said, "We never told the press anything like this, and we don't have any idea of who might be the killers."

Police sources had said that the investigators were also looking into whether any hostility he had earned from forming Kafur Thana unit AL committee led to the killing.

Khorshed headed a seven-member committee, which was tasked with choosing the committee members.

Besides, the investigators are gathering information if he was in dispute with anyone for personal matters, IO Kabir said.

They are yet to extract any information from Ismail Hossain alias Sujon and Mohammad Sohel, the two arrestees who were placed on a seven-day remand each on May 18.

Pictures show Saddam in his underwear

REUTERS, London

A picture of Saddam Hussein in his underpants was splashed across the front-page of Britain's biggest-selling newspaper yesterday.

The Sun newspaper quoted US military sources as saying they had handed over the pictures "in the hope of dealing a body blow to the resistance in Iraq."

Other photographs showed Saddam, with short, dyed-black hair and a moustache, washing clothes by hand and asleep on his bed.

But a US military statement said the pictures might be a year old, contravened Saddam's rights as a prisoner and could have broken the Geneva Convention.

"Multi-National Forces-Iraq is disappointed at the possibility that someone responsible for the security, welfare, and detention of Saddam would take and provide these photos for public release," the statement said.

"This lapse is being aggressively investigated to determine, if possible, who took the photos, and to ensure existing procedures and directives are complied with to prevent this from happening again," it said.

Toppled from power in the US war in Iraq in April 2003, Saddam was captured hiding in a small underground bunker in December of the same year. Apart from a brief court appearance last year, no images of Saddam have been made public since then.

Saddam is expected to stand trial in next year on charges of genocide, torture and crimes against humanity. If he is found guilty he could face the death penalty.

"Saddam is not superman or God, he is just an ageing and humble old man," The Sun quoted the military source as saying.

"It's important that the people of Iraq see him like that to destroy the myth. Maybe that will kill a bit of the passion in the fanatics who still follow him."

"It's over, guys. The evil days of Saddam's Baath Party are never coming back - and here's the proof," the source said.

The newspaper said the pictures were taken at a top secret location where Saddam was being held in a 12-ft by 9-ft (3.6-m by 2.7-m) cell, watched 24 hours a day on closed circuit television by special forces and military police.

It is not the first time pictures of US detainees in Iraqi jails have been leaked to the media.

A year ago graphic photographs of the abuse of detainees in the notorious Abu Ghraib jail outraged world opinion and were described as the best recruiting campaign for Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

Citizenship

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granted a certificate of naturalisation under the Naturalisation Act 1926.

It sets three classes of citizenship cancellation -- renunciation, deprivation and for residing abroad for five years.

If a man ceases to be a citizen of Bangladesh, all of his minor children will also lose their citizenship.

A citizen by registration or naturalisation will lose citizenship if he resides outside Bangladesh for five or more consecutive years. The rule however does not apply for those who are employed abroad as government employees or stay abroad for treatment, studies or any other valid reason.

The draft interprets that a person born in a ship or aircraft registered in Bangladesh or hired by or belonging to any Bangladeshi citizen, company or statutory corporation and either of whose parents is a citizen of Bangladesh will be considered as one born in Bangladesh.

Floating bodies

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our divers were unable to go deep in the water due to strong currents," said Reaz Ahsan Khandakar, chairman of the BIWTA.

Abuoy marking the accident spot was also swept away by heavy currents. Rescuers were trying to locate the vessel until evening.

M V Raipura went down on Tuesday night with more than 200 passengers on board and about 20 of them swam ashore. It is lying at least 30 feet under water.

Our Manikganj correspondent reports that people present near the accident spot said their hopes for any more survivors have faded. Hundreds of anxious relatives of the missing still crowded the riverbank for their loved ones, alive or dead. Many of them blamed the authorities for their failure to salvage the launch even three days into the accident.

"I am staying at the salvage ship. As the rescue operation is taking time, they (victims' relatives) could be impatient," said Reaz Ahsan.