

Cops club Ctg traders

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In the wake of frequent hijacks and highway robberies in recent times, the CCCI initiated the protest programme on behalf of the business community, demanding immediate measures to check the menace.

A large contingent of police was deployed in front of the chamber building and adjoining areas from noon.

At Barik Building crossing, Choumuhuni area, Dewanhat intersection, Badamtali and Kadamtali points, police prevented businessmen's processions leading towards the chamber building from joining the human chain. At places they charged baton on the businessmen.

Police also barred the CCCI leaders from coming out of chamber building. Chamber Director Amirul Hoque got injured as a policeman charged baton on his back and pushed him when he tried to make his way through the police barricade.

The CCCI leaders led by President Saifuzzaman appeared before the police officials there and after an altercation between them, police allowed the businessmen to carry their programme.

Hundreds of businessmen joined the chain from 3:10pm to 3:40pm, which was followed by a protest rally addressed by the chamber president, Senior Vice President SM Nurul Haque and Vice President MA Latif.

Denouncing the police actions, CCCI President Saifuzzaman

Chowdhury Javed demanded apology for it from Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) commissioner.

"It was a completely peaceful programme. Yet police resorted to unexpected actions," the CCCI chief said, adding, "Our programme was against highway robbers and criminals. But going tough against us, the police has surely taken the side of robbers."

He said frequent incidents of hijacking and robbery on Chittagong-Dhaka highway was bringing about ruin for the small traders while the police hardly came to any help.

"Police show reluctance to register cases without bribe and even harass the victims in some cases," he alleged.

The business leaders urged the government to declare Chittagong-Dhaka Highway a 'safe road' and demanded regular highway patrol on the road.

Although truck hijack and highway robbery on passenger buses have become an almost everyday affair, the incidents mostly remain unreported as the police remain inactive and the transport owners also try to hide such incidents to avoid police harassment, business sources said.

Meanwhile, the CCCI leaders at an emergency meeting yesterday afternoon convened a press conference to be held at 11.30am today to brief journalists about their next course of actions.

Kashmir solution within grasp

Says Musharraf

BBC ONLINE

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has said a solution to the dispute over Kashmiris within the grasp of himself and the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

He was speaking at the concluding session in Islamabad of a meeting of South Asian parliamentarians. "We must grasp a fleeting moment," Gen Musharraf told reporters afterwards.

At least four Indian soldiers were killed on Friday in Indian-administered Kashmir. More than 40,000 people have died in 14 years of insurgency.

"I personally feel it [Kashmir's solution] should be done within the tenures of [Indian] Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and myself," Musharraf said in Islamabad.

"Since I believe that this harmony exists between us two, I strongly believe - if we really are sincere about reaching a final peace - it would be more possible that it is reached between us two."

Referring to the Line of Control separating the Indian and Pakistani-administered parts of Kashmir, Gen Musharraf said a lasting solution lay in rendering boundaries irrelevant.

He said demilitarisation by Indian security forces - accused of atrocities against Kashmiris - should go hand in hand with an end to the atrocities of militants who have been fighting those security forces since 1989.

The Pakistani leader said Kashmiris should be granted maximum self-governance, in line with their wishes.

No fair polls minus

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independent secretariat had been unfavourable to holding elections in a free and fair manner, he declined to comment.

"The reforms in the election commission should be brought in through a consensus of the political parties," Syed said after attending the last workday of his five-year tenure, which expires tomorrow.

The CEC submitted the proposals for reforms during his farewell call on President Iajuddin Ahmed at Bangabhaban.

The president thanked Syed for fulfilling his constitutional obligations by overseeing the general election of October 1, 2001, as well as union parishad, municipality and city corporation polls impartially.

The president said he hopes that the commission would be able to hold future elections too in a "free, fair, impartial and peaceful atmosphere".

The CEC was scheduled to meet the press at his office after handing the reforms proposals to the president. But he did not come back to his office from Bangabhaban. He however replied in writing to a few questions from the journalists, and described his experiences as the CEC for the last five years.

The much-talked about proposals from the CEC also include introduction of electronic voting machines and electronic voter roll, army deployment in the city corporation and municipality polls, and introduction of electoral enquiry committees for the local government polls.

The proposals were placed against a backdrop of the mainstream opposition parties and the civil society calling for reforms in the caretaker government system and the EC.

The EC stresses the need for an independent secretariat as it on numerous occasions in the past had faced difficulties in conducting polls freely due to interference from the executive.

Election Commissioner AK Mohammad Ali said that they propose for the EC Secretariat to be under full control of the commission with budget as per its requirement. "Only the election commission

should have the authority to recruit its officials including the secretary, and formulate its budget as per its requirement," Mohammad Ali told The Daily Star.

Election Commissioner M Munsef Ali told journalists at his office that they have initiated the move in the interest of the country and the people. "We together finalised the reform proposal, and there is no disagreement among us."

The CEC in written replies said that the reforms in the election commission should be considered overall. He said it has become a challenge for the commission to rein back the election expenses, and make registration with the EC mandatory for the political parties.

"Various other reforms in fact are needed while there is an absence of good governance and responsible media. Besides, black money, and a culture of defaulting on loans are creating a social chaos," he observed adding, "The election commission will consider if the civil society and political parties propose reforms to make conditions favourable for free and fair elections. Such reforms may be brought about through the caretaker government."

The CEC admitted that he did not always get all-out co-operation from the secretariat and the government in conducting the polls in last five years. He however described it as 'stray incidents'.

LAST WORKING DAY IN OFFICE
The tenure of the CEC will be expired on May 22. But as the day coincides with a public holiday, yesterday was the last working day for MASyed.

He came at his office at 8:30am and made preparations for meeting the president. Besides, he met different officials in the secretariat.

He even paid a visit to the EC secretary in his (secretary) room. There has been a rift between the two and the EC secretary has been avoiding attending the commission's meetings for last one and a half years.

The EC secretariat did not arrange any formal farewell for MA Syed.

15 Indians pushed in

UNB, *C'wabaganj*

Indian Border Security Force (BSF) pushed 15 Bangla-speaking Indian nationals into Bangladesh territory on Friday night.

Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) sources said the BSF men of Mousia camp pushed five men, eight women and two children into the country through Gilabari border in Bholahat upazila in the dead of night.

On information, BDR personnel from Gilabari outpost rushed to the spot and held the Indians.

Commander of 28 Rifles Battalion Lieutenant Colonel Zahid admitted the push-in incident. He said they were trying to push the Indians back.

Meanwhile, all the BDR outposts along the Chapainawabganj and Naogaon borders have been alerted to resist push-in bids by the BSF.

5 'powerful' bombs recovered

UNB, *Meherpur*

Police on Friday night recovered five powerful bombs from a poor man's house at Darbeshpur village under Sadar upazila.

The bombs, each weighing 1kg and suspected to have been smuggled from the across the border, were hidden in a bag.

On Wednesday night, bomb attack by unknown assailants left Krishak League leader Wayes Ali seriously injured in the town. One of his legs was amputated at Pongu (orthopaedic) Hospital in Dhaka.

Jalil observes

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Jalil said Awami League might release its proposal for reform of the caretaker government system on May 25 or 26.

He announced countrywide demonstration tomorrow to protest "police action" on party workers during yesterday's hartal.

China to turn

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The decision came at the 11th meeting of the Bangladesh-China Joint Economic Commission (JEC), held at the External Resources Division (ERD) at Aargaon yesterday.

ERD Secretary Ismail Zabihullah led the 17-member Bangladesh delegation, while Vice-minister for Commerce Yu Guanzhou led 11-member Chinese side.

"China has agreed our proposal to convert the suppliers' credit, worth US\$ 70 million into loan for Balancing, Modernising, Rehabilitating and Expanding (BMRE) of the KMP," said a highly placed source, who attended the meeting.

"China has agreed to do after examination," said Bangladesh leader at the post-JEC briefing.

Earlier, the closed KMP was handed over to China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation on May 31, 2001 for its modernisation. But, Bangladesh retreated when it found the project is not viable under the suppliers' credit and from then, the project was hanging on.

On other issues, Ismail Zabihullah said Bangladesh received the facility of paying back the Chinese interest-free loans through exports of goods from Bangladesh for five more years (2005-2010). "This facility will be ended in July this year," he informed.

At the meeting, Bangladesh sought greater access of its exportable textile items to Chinese markets to sustain in the post-MFA phase out.

"On the preferential treatment, we granted duty free access of 82 categories of Bangladeshi goods to China," said Yu Guanzhou.

Pro-AL lawyers

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Pro-Awami League lawyers, held a rally at the First Hall of Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) Mhaban where its convener Barrister Amir-ul-Islam presided.

The Speaker and the law minister are conspiring to destroy the judiciary by sending orders to the judges and trying to save a "former party cadre judge" who has a fake certificate, said a press release following yesterday's rally.

"Advocate Bachchu was killed as part of the alliance government's blueprint for killing the intellectuals. Lawyers across the country irrespective of party and opinion will build up a greater movement to free the judiciary including the Supreme Court from bad reputation and bring the people's confidence to the judiciary," the press release added.

SCBA President advocate Mahubey Alam, General Secretary M Enayetur Rahim, Member Secretary of the Parishad Subrata Chowdhury, MA Halim, Shah Mohammad Zahurul Haq, Moinul Islam Chowdhury, former SCBA general secretary Bashir Ahmed, Abdul Mannan Sujan, Kazi Sajwar Hossain, Sirajul Haq, Abdur Rob, Momtazuddin Ahmed Mehedi, Sattendra Chandra Bhakta, among others, spoke at the rally conducted by advocate Shahidul Islam.

The Parishad also arranged meetings and doa mahfil in their bar associations throughout the country.

Meanwhile, lawyers of the Dhaka Bar Association yesterday brought out a procession on the court premises, held a rally and demanded immediate arrest of Bachchu's killers.

SC Bar chief, secy

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Rahman Khan presided over the Forum meeting organised to protest against the SCBA cancellation of the membership of the law minister and the speaker. The rally termed the cancellation "illegal" and said it was done with political motives.

The pro-government rally was also addressed by Forum's Secretary Saidur Rahman, Golam Arshad, AK Mujibur Rahman, Shah Khosruzzaman, Humayun Kabir Bulbul, Public Prosecutor Abdullah Mahmud Hasan and Sanaullah Miah.

"The new Supreme Court Bar Association committee is illegal. We don't accept it. The whole committee is unwanted," Barrister Ziaur told the rally.

"The SCBA cancelled the membership of the law minister and the speaker without serving them with any show-cause notice. This is autocratic."

"We will serve Mahubey Alam, Enayet and Rakan with show-cause notices asking them to explain why their SCBA membership would not be cancelled," Ziaur vowed.

Talking to The Daily Star later, SCBA President Mahubey Alam rubished the Forum declaration: "This announcement shows how bankrupt they are. They boycotted the SCBA elections as they lacked acceptability. I challenge them to

verify our acceptability by taking signatures of the SCBA members."

"One cannot attack others by being a paper tiger," Alam added, "I advise them to work with sanity. They do not have any authority to issue show-cause notices or declare anyone unwanted," he noted.

The pro-government lawyers' meeting, meanwhile, announced an agitation programme in protest at the cancellation of memberships of the speaker and the law minister. They decided to form a human chain on the Supreme Court premises tomorrow, hold a rally there Tuesday, and stage rallies and take out processions in the courts across the country Wednesday.

Barrister Amir-ul-Islam, who chaired the meeting of the anti-government lawyers, said, "The speaker in his ruling said that the on-going lawyers agitation is unconstitutional. This ruling was out of his jurisdiction."

Barrister Amir added that the law minister was also interfering with the judiciary.

The meeting was addressed, among others, by Mahubey Alam, Enayetur Rahim, Subrata Chowdhury, MA Halim, Moinul Islam Chowdhury and Shah Mohammad Zahurul Haq.

US probes leakage

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into their source - printed one further photograph of Saddam yesterday, viewed through a coil of barbed wire and walking, seemingly in conversation with someone.

A separate picture showed Saddam's cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as "Chemical Ali" for his role in gas attacks on northern Iraq during an offensive against the Kurds in 1987. He is pictured holding a towel, and apparently struggling to get up from a chair, using a walking stick.

The newspaper also showed a photo of Huda Salih Mahdi Ammass, a US-educated microbiologist dubbed "Mrs Anthrax" and "Chemical Sally" for her alleged involvement with Saddam's weapons of mass destruction programme.

In Friday morning's edition, the newspaper - Britain's best-selling daily - ran a front-page cover of a bare-chested Saddam standing in white underwear, with the headline "Tyrant's in his pants", using the British term for underwear briefs.

Billed as a world exclusive, the

Sun also showed the 68-year-old wearing a white-robed garment while washing his clothes by hand in a bucket.

The pictures, which also ran in the New York Post, another tabloid owned by media mogul Rupert Murdoch, immediately drew protests from human rights groups and Muslim groups, who complained they violated the Geneva Conventions over the treatment of prisoners.

Budget session

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work apart from passing the Copyright (Amendment) Bill 2005.

On May 16, the House heard a heated debate over the pro-Awami League lawyers' agitation and condemned their attitude towards the chief justice and other judges in the highest judiciary.

During the session, ministers concerned replied to 129 out of the 678 questions. Some 82 call-attention notices under rule 71 were received for the last session, but a few were discussed.

Relatives protest

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banks as the metal rescue wire tying the sunken MV Raipura to BIWTA salvage vessel Rustam snapped again for the third consecutive day, further delaying the rescue operation. It was stayed in the evening amid raging wind and a fierce current.

Meanwhile, the police and locals retrieved five badly rotten bodies from the river drifted by a strong current as far away as Teprakandi and Madankhali villages under Decree Char union in Faridpur. With this, the death toll in one of the country's worst riverine accident rose to 55, with some 120 still missing and feared drowned.

The strong current frustrated the attempts of the divers to raise the sunken vessel from the riverbed. MV Raipura went down four days ago with around 200 passengers on board. Only some 20 passengers could swim ashore and the rest were trapped inside.

Locals fear many bodies might have been washed downstream, as the authorities have been searching only in the day. But the relatives of the missing are still waiting for miracles to happen or at least to get back the bodies and give them a decent burial.

Our Manikganj correspondent reports: Several hundred people including relatives of the accident victims demonstrated at the spot in the afternoon, accusing the rescuers of negligence. They took out a procession, shouting demands to get back the bodies immediately and to speed up the rescue process.

"We've been staying here for the last four days and still don't know when this waiting will end," said a relative,

Tax holiday

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sectors like pharmaceuticals, melamine, steel and fertiliser.

Saturated sectors will not get any facilities under tax holiday, it said.

The draft has also proposed to reduce the time span for getting tax holiday facilities.

At present all industries in manufacturing and service sectors get tax holiday facilities.

Industries in Dhaka and Chittagong get tax holiday facilities for five years from their launching and for seven years in other districts.

The government has planned to reduce tax holiday facilities for Dhaka and Chittagong-based industries for four years and for other areas to six years.

The government is also planning to bring some changes to prevent loopholes in providing tax holiday facilities to industries, sources said.

Industries are getting tax holiday facilities since 1974.

Cops, pickets clash

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to enter the police station but they heard from outside the groans of the activists.

During the shutdown, around 40 opposition activists were injured in clashes with police, four of them hit by rubber bullets.

A photojournalist and a police constable were also injured in the incidents.

Pickets poured petrol on a CNG-run autorickshaw and set it afire at Khilgaon in the morning. Driver of the vehicle Amir Hossain suffered burns and was admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital (DMCH).

The main opposition called the hartal, second in four days, to protest the killing of Khorshed Alam Bachchu, a front line leader of the AL's city unit. Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) supported the shutdown.

The previous hartal was enforced in the capital on Thursday.

The shutdown drew criticism from different quarters as the ongoing Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations were postponed due to the stoppage, affecting about five lakh examinees.

CLASHES IN OLD PART OF DHAKA

At Lalbagh, riot police charged baton and fired tear gas shells and rubber bullets to disperse pickets, leaving about 25 opposition activists injured.

Police chased an AL procession near Lalbagh Fort at about 11:20am. Pickets retaliated throwing brickbats at police. Another procession on Hamath Ghosh Road at about the same time attacked police, prompting the law enforcers to fire tear gas shells and rubber bullets.

Police constable Foyez Ahmad suffered eye injuries when hit by a brickbat and was admitted to Razarbagh Police Hospital. Opposition activists Anu, Monir Mollick, Jahangir and Monu Miah, hit and injured by rubber bullets, were admitted to Dhaka Medical College and Hospital.

Police picked up at least 11 people from the spot. Earlier, police cordoned off a gathering organised by Haji Selim, former AL lawmaker from Lalbagh area.

Police also used batons to foil city AL leader Sayeed Khokon's bid to bring out a procession near the District Judge's Court at about 10:30am.

DHANMONDI, BANGABANDHU AVENUE AND OTHER AREAS

A Juba Mahila League procession led by Apu Ukil in Dhanmondi at about 11:30am came under police baton charge. The law enforcers, both male and female, assaulted the women pickets, dragged at least 30 onto police van and took them to Dhanmondi Police Station. Police beat them up there.

When contacted, the duty officer at the police station declined to talk. A press release of the Juba Mahila League alleged that a sub-inspector at the police station, Ramiz, assaulted the female activists inside the police station. At least 18 of them were shifted to Ramna Police Station at about 2:00pm and beaten up again, it added.

A procession led by AL leader and former minister Motia Chowdhury came under police attack at about 9:30am when it tried to enter the cordoned off AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue. Police charged batons on the opposition loyalists.

Fazlur Rahman, a cameraman of private television channel ntv, was injured in the police action.

Agitated demonstrators damaged a number of passenger buses, private cars and CNG-run

autorickshaws plying the streets during the hartal in different areas including Shantinagar, Motijheel and Mipur.

BUSINESSES HAMPER

Most shops, schools, banks, businesses and the stock exchanges in Dhaka and Chittagong remained closed due to the hartal while cargo-handling at the seaports suffered heavily.

In the capital, a large number of passenger buses plied the streets, much more than on previous hartal days. Presence in government offices was almost normal but private firms in commercial areas like Motijheel remained closed.

Presence of opposition leaders and activists on the streets was less. Around 7,000 law enforcers including paramilitary Bangladesh Rifles personnel fanned out across the capital to head off possible violence.

OTHER PLACES

Our staff correspondent in Sylhet reports that police baton-charged a procession of district AL near the city's court point, leaving at least 10 injured.

Our staff correspondent reports from Chittagong: Hartal was observed in the port city partially. No pickets were seen on the streets during hartal hours.

Reports received from Rajshahi, Rangpur and Gopalganj said local units of the AL brought out processions in support of the hartal.

Pickets' delight

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"But soon I saw a youth running in from behind and throwing some liquid [from a bottle] at my car. It burst into flames before I could scramble out of it," Ameer said, lying on a hospital bed. "I could not save myself though I took off my shirt and trousers as soon as they caught fire."

On seeing the three-wheeler in flames, locals rushed to the spot, and took Ameer to the DMCH at about 11:00am.

The doctors at the DMCH said that at least 40 percent of Ameer's body was burnt. Injuries especially to the legs and the right hand are quite deep and they would take a thorough treatment to heal. They however could not say for sure how long the treatment should run.

Ameer, who hails from Jibon Nagar of Chuadanga district, has been living in Dhaka for the last eight years. He went back home two years ago with a hope of settling in the village, but having found no better source of income, returned to Dhaka in 2002.

Now yesterday's incident seems to have set off a chain of crises for his wife Aklima Khatun, 33, and their two daughters, over their living and education.

"What will we eat now, how shall I send my daughters to school?" Aklima wailed, talking to The Daily Star about the fears of an impending ordeal.

She said her husband would earn Tk 200 a day and nothing would be left after spending for food, house rent and school fees of the daughters.

"I have borrowed Tk 6,500 from my neighbours and already spent the amount for Ameer's treatment," she said adding that she is clueless about how to bear the rest of the treatment expenses.

"My priority obviously is to treat my husband, but where shall I get the money from? Will the doctors treat him free of cost, and even if they do, how am I going to run the family with two school-going daughters?" said Aklima with eyes brimming with tears.

Moudud

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comments during an interview with the BBC Bangla Service last night.

"So far, there is no instance of discussion with the opposition in this regard, but it will be good if we can have such practices existing in the country," Moudud said.

When asked whether the government will take an initiative to create conditions favourable for discussion, he asked, "Why should the present government take such initiative?"

"The government has to take care of the entire nation, not only the opposition, he said adding, "The opposition represents only a part of the nation, not the entire nation."

The government must recruit a person who will be acceptable to all and can act neutrally, Moudud said.

Referring to the outgoing Chief Election Commissioner's proposals for reforms in the Election Commission, he said that the government would give its reaction only after knowing about it in detail.

Power subsidy

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pump-owners, leaving the target beneficiaries, the real farmers, out. So, the purpose of the subsidy -- to bring down the cost of farming -- gets lost, explained the letter.

Anwar said he learned the situation during his recent visits to different areas by talking with farmers and local leaders.

The agriculture ministry knows the exact number of irrigation pumps used across the country, the farmers who use these pumps and the land area covered, he said in the letter. So, he maintained, it is feasible to hand out the rebate money directly to the farmers.

About 25 percent of the country's irrigation is done by using electricity and the rest by diesel. The government spends around Tk 50 crore a year to subsidise the power used in the agricultural sector.

Sources at the