

## SOCIAL FREEDOMS

## Iran hardliners call for clampdown

REUTERS, Tehran

Iran's ultra-conservative President-elect Mahmoud Ahmadinejad yesterday faced calls from hardline supporters to clamp down on social freedoms allowed under the country's outgoing reformist president.

"Islamic and revolutionary culture have been neglected in the past years," the official IRNA news agency quoted hardline lawmaker Mohammad Taqi Rahbar as saying. "Even if women remove the small handkerchiefs they wear instead of a proper veil, nobody says anything," he said adding that mixing of young men and women in public also contravened the values of an Islamic society.

Ahmadinejad's victory was sealed in part thanks to the support of ultra-conservative clerics and organisations such as the Basij religious militia which enforces the Islamic state's strict moral codes.

But analysts said Ahmadinejad would have to tread carefully in trying to honour his hardcore backers' beliefs without risking unrest if hard-won freedoms enjoyed under outgoing reformist President Mohammad Khatami are curtailed.

"Hardliners expect him (Ahmadinejad) to tighten social freedoms," said sociologist Mohammad Razeghi. "Ahmadinejad faces a tough choice."

Few analysts believe Ahmadinejad would reverse the more lax enforcement of Islamic codes that now allow women to wear make-up and young couples to fraternise in public without fear of arrest.

## 13 Jubo League

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Liakat Ali of Bangshal Road in Old Dhaka had filed a case under the Speedy Trial (Law and Disruption) Act after the arson attack that left his brother Bulbul injured.

Kotwali police arrested the 13 activists of Jubo League, youth wing of the Awami League, for the picketing, though Liakat did not mention any name.

The investigation officer pressed charges against them on April 5.

## Police sergeant held

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"We have found the charge true and already suspended Zulfiqar from the service," said Additional Deputy Commissioner of the Detective Branch Shahidul Haq Bhuiyan, adding that departmental action will be taken against him as per rules.

Azhar Ali, owner of Rajdoot Money Exchange at Motijheel, told newsmen that a sergeant stopped his car in front of the General Post Office (GPO) while he was returning to his 122 Moneisar Road residence in Jigatola at around 5:10pm on Tuesday with his two nephews.

"The sergeant demanded that I was carrying money obtained from hundi business," Azhar said. "I refused and told him that I have Tk 5,35,000 and 50,000 Saudi Riyal [worth Tk 91,2000] with me which are legal."

Zulfiqar, whose nameplate could not be seen as he was wearing a raincoat, then took Azhar to Patrol Inspector (PI) Arshadullah who suggested to hand him over to the Paltan Police Station, Azhar said.

The sergeant got into Azhar's private car and took him along with his nephews near Hotel Pritam at Bijoynagar instead of the police station.

The sergeant threatened Azhar saying he will lose the money and be

## Dr Sitara laid to rest

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where it was carried to the foot of Aparajejo Bangla.

There people from all social strata paid their tributes to the late teacher.

Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia's Protocol Officer Faridul Islam and Assignment Officer Firaz Mahmud Iqbal placed wreaths on behalf of the PM.

On behalf of opposition leader and Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina, her Political Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury placed wreaths on Sitara's coffin.

DU Vice Chancellor (VC) Prof SMA Faiz, Pro-VC Prof AFM Yusuf Haider, DU Teachers' Association President Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, General Secretary Prof Akhteruzzaman, Prof Anisuzzaman, Kazi Shahidullah, Prof Sadeka Halim, Rahmat Ullah, dramatist Mamunur Rashid, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Manjurul Hossain Bulbul, Altaf Mahmud, among others, paid homage to the deceased.

Daily Prothom Alo Paribar, Daily Sangbad Paribar, Bangladesh Observer Paribar, Dhaka University Journalists' Association, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD), Jatiya Nari Jote, Nilphamari District AL and front organisations, Sub-Editor's Council, BDNEWS, UNB, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Press Institute of Bangladesh, Aranyak Natya Sampradai, Srabon Prokashani, Satirtha-80 and teachers and students of different departments placed wreaths.

Different student organisations including Ruling BNP's unit wing Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal, AL-backed Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL)-led seven student organisations,

## Tigers to face

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interested about their last game and said that they would go for two changes in the side that lost against England at Headingley on June 27.

Paceman Tapash Baisya will come in for Nazmul Hossain. But the choice between left-arm spinner Manzarul Islam and all-rounder Khaled Mahmud would be made after having a long hard look at the wicket, which is likely to assist the medium-pacers more than spinners.

Bangladesh will go into the game on an even footing against the world champions following a magnificent 5-wicket win at Cardiff and a 10-wicket defeat at Old Trafford.

Australia will certainly be looking for a full game after their washout against England on Tuesday so that they prepare themselves for the July 2 final against the hosts at Lord's.

Bangladesh, on the other hand, will hope for a repeat act of Cardiff and fireworks from Mohammad Ashrafui, who hit a classy 100 and a rapid-fire 58 against the Australians in the last two games.

Meanwhile, the organisers have sold 6,000 tickets in advance and they are optimistic of a full house at the 8,000-capacity ground, which was the home of Kent's most famous son Leslie Ames, the wicketkeeper-batsman.

## Bidisha to sue

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against him. On the contrary, the government is now filing cases one after another against me," Bidisha complained.

Asked whether she was tortured during interrogation, Bidisha, also a former JP Presidium member, refused to make any comment on that.

She said she is not afraid at all, rather Ershad is afraid of her. Ershad is taking police protection in front of his house because he fears that I might enter his residence," she added.

"Ershad has said the Bidisha chapter has been closed in his life. But I can tell that it is not so easy to close 'the Bidisha chapter'," Bidisha commented.

"I am a daughter of an intellectual person. The entire educated society of the country is with me. So, how could Ershad expect to close the 'Bidisha chapter' in his life so easily?" questioned Bidisha.

Referring to Ershad's recent behaviour, she said he is behaving with me like this under pressure from a quarter.

## AL enforces

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today if the government does not meet the demands.

AL sources said they were compelled to observe the hartal as the government did not accept the party's proposals on the budget.

The proposals include withdrawal of tax on salt, milk powder, diesel and kerosene, software export, SIM cards, and increasing the allocation for agriculture.

The party yesterday decided to bring out processions from four spots in the capital -- Russell Square, Nilkhet, Kakoli and Motijheel -- during today's hartal.

AL and its wings yesterday brought out pre-hartal processions in the capital and held rallies in Dhanmondi, Motijheel, Shyampur, Lalbagh and Mirpur.

## Cops seek

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threatening her and her family with death.

Sub-inspector (SI) Mohammad Abu Sayed submitted a petition to the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Dhaka seeking permission to investigate the GD.

However, the IO did not get an order as the conducting magistrate was absent from the court.

The petition quoting the GD said former military dictator Ershad along with his hired gunman went to Trisha's Uttara house at 8:00pm on Monday after Bidisha's release on bail.

Ershad took his party men including Reza and Mashi in five vehicles and asked guard Raju to open the gate, it added. Refused, they tried to bribe the guard and then loudly threatened him.

Ershad and his men threatened Trisha, who came down hearing the uproar, not to allow her sister in the house.

"If Bidisha stays here, we'll kill you and your family and abduct your child Nihan," she quoted them as saying.

Trisha also mentioned she is scared as the gunmen are hanging around her house since the incident.

## Rab rescues

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The rescued businessman told private news agency BDNEWS that four criminals abducted him in front of the Daily Janakantha office around 9:30pm on June 27.

"The criminals took me to Saiful's rented house at 245 Zakir Gali at East Rampura and confined me inside a room," Tipu said. "They demanded Tk 3 lakh from me as ransom and threatened to kill me if I did not oblige them."

"I rang up my younger brother Ripon in Habiganj and asked him to come to Dhaka with the money and contact them," continued Tipu.

Ripon tipped off the Rab-2 men, who instructed him to carry the money to Rampura. When he went there, the elite anticrime force members in plainclothes caught the three abductors.

No case was filed until 6:00pm.

## 6 killed, 20 hurt in Kashmir violence

AFP, Sri Nagar

Six people including four police were killed in two shoot-outs in Indian Kashmir, police said yesterday, while separate rebel attacks left 20 people injured.

The first gun battle erupted when troops and police raided a house in southern Doda district where militants were hiding on Tuesday, a police spokesman said.

"Two policemen who tried to storm the house in an attempt to kill the militants were killed the moment they stepped into the house," he said.

"In the ensuing gun battle one militant and two more policemen

died and three houses were damaged."

In the adjoining Udhampur district suspected rebels murdered a Muslim civilian, police said but did not elaborate.

Three policemen and 13 civilians were meanwhile injured in a grenade attack by rebels Wednesday near the headquarters of India's ruling Congress party in the summer capital Srinagar, the spokesman said.

Several women were among the injured.

Earlier Tuesday, four soldiers were injured in an ambush by militants in the northern district of Kupwara, the police said.

## Money whitening

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kind of compromise between ethics and reality."

He however assured parliament of toughening the anti-money laundering, banking and taxation laws so the government is able to control black money.

"This year is going to be the last opportunity for whitening black money and no such scope will ever be offered in future," he firmly declared.

"This is unethical whether the tax is 7.5 percent or 10 percent," he said in response to the suggestions of raising the tax for whitening black money.

Though the finance minister reduced tax on cellphone SIM cards, he was very critical of the hue and cry raised on the proposal of imposing the Tk 1,200 VAT and supplementary duty on it.

"The rat has come out of the bag after I imposed tax on SIM card," it has been exposed how are they [mobile companies] exploiting them [mobile phone subscribers]," Saifur said.

He said two mobile companies in Pakistan got licences paying \$582 million, whereas in Bangladesh they [mobile operators] have not paid a

penny. Moreover, their call charges are very high, he explained.

Saifur claimed that he did the right thing by imposing tax on SIM cards but since the newspapers are making it an issue and people's negative attitude has changed his mind, he decided to reduce the tax.

In the budget proposal the finance minister had imposed a 10 percent tax on earnings from computer software business until June 30, 2008.

Saifur said the tax was proposed as the software businessmen failed to make any substantial progress over the last five years in spite of various sorts of opportunities offered by the government.

In his wrap-up speech, the minister responded to the criticisms of his budgetary proposals from various people and organisations.

"We are going to appoint a tax ombudsman but I had to face obstacles in getting it approved [in the cabinet meeting]. I will think twice before going for such reforms in future," he said in a frustrating tone.

He however thanked Communications Minister Nazmul Huda for supporting him for the first time when the tax ombudsman bill was placed in the cabinet recently.

## Garment factory

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floor, that also accommodated chemicals, got in flames first as an explosion occurred due to unidentified reason, factory authorities said.

The factory did not have adequate fire-extinguishing equipment although fire blazed the factory couple of times before, workers alleged.

Fire-fighters with 12 vehicles from Savar, EPZ, Mohammadpur, Mirpur and Fire Service and Civil Defence Headquarters reached the spot and brought the fire under control at around 11:40am.

The fire gutted 3,000 ton yarn and cloths, 100 knitting machines, three sharing machines, 40 brushing machines, 640 sewing machines and two standard machines, said Moinuddin Biswas, owner of the factory.

The fire that burnt down all the sections of the factory except the dying and administration building left cracks in the building walls, Biswas said, adding that the boiler did not explode.

RI Sazzad, director of the textile unit, told reporters that they could not use the fire-extinguishing equipment as all the sections were closed in the night shift.

Meanwhile, the factory authorities alleged that negligence and lack of equipment of the firefighters caused delay in controlling the fire.

Dilip Ghosh, in charge of the firefighting unit, however, denied the allegations.

A high official of the Fire Service told The Daily Star that the factory authorities did not inform them about the materials and chemicals kept

inside the factory.

"We brought the fire under control in a couple of hours. But an explosion inside the factory again caused fire that engulfed the building once more," he said, adding, "If they [the factory authorities] had informed us about those materials, we could have taken other precautions."

Fire Service and Civil Defence will form a committee to probe the matter, the organisation's Deputy Director of Dhaka Division Selim Newaj Bhuiyan said.

Meanwhile, damage of the factory has left thousands of its employees to uncertainty.

A five-member team of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association led by its Secretary Fasiur Rahman yesterday went to the factory to estimate the damage..

## NOAB-BSP

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President Mahbubul Alam and BSP President Mainul Hossain, said they have repeatedly demanded reduction of the import duty, but the government is not paying any heed to the demand.

They said the import duty on newsprint in India and Nepal is 5 percent while in Pakistan it is 2.5 percent and in Sri Lanka it is only 2.6 percent.

The statement said despite repeated request to discuss the matters, the finance minister did not agree to meet with the steering committee comprising newspaper owners, editors and union leaders.

## Wasteland jolting

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Sufferings of people of the nearby villages, many of whom had left their houses on safety grounds, further mounted as arsenic contamination of tubewell water has created drinking water crisis.

Niko officials detected the contamination of water and asked the locals to avoid drinking it.

Meanwhile, public protests against Niko's activities and panic among locals intensified yesterday amid reports that the Canadian company is going to drill a fresh relief well to seal the main well that had caught fire earlier following the January 7 explosion in it.

Niko officials said preparations are underway for the job.

A team of drilling experts visited the gas field areas yesterday.

The proposed relief well will be about 230 metres off the damaged main well, sources said.

A Niko engineer said preliminary work for the new relief well begins next week. Transportation of components of US company Century's rig from Moulvibazar gas field will start on July 2.

Niko has already prepared the design for the new relief well and will submit it to Petrobangla for approval in a day or two. "If everything goes well, the company is hopeful of starting the drilling on July 25," the engineer said requesting anonymity.

Against this backdrop, locals

## 54 Bagerhat jail guards under watch

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The security guards at Bagerhat District Jail have been kept under constant surveillance following circulation of leaflets on their 10-point demand and discrimination in the recently announced pay scale.

A probe is on to detect the persons behind the leaflet distribution inside the jail on Monday night.

Sources said all the 54 security guards have decided not to lift their quotas of ration and withdraw salaries next month in protest against the pay scale discrimination.

They have expressed their solidarity with the ongoing movement of Bangladesh Kara Sangram Parishad.

The jailer told The Daily Star the situation is fully under control despite circulation of a number of provocative leaflets.

## Strike at DU

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The five-point demand includes expulsion of Jatiyatadabi Chhatra Dal (JCD) men responsible for the attack on general students on May 31, action against the officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station, and compensation for injured students during campus violence.

The leaders at the meeting demanded resignation of the DU vice-chancellor and proctor saying they have failed to ensure students' security.

Mugging, extortion and other crimes by the pro-BNP JCD cadres are tarnishing the image of the student community, they alleged. They also demanded cancellation of "illegal" appointments of JCD cadres to different government and autonomous bodies.

The BCL president urged the VC to expel the JCD cadres, whose photos of assaulting students were published in different dailies.

## 20 injured as AL

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leaving at least 20 people, including nine policemen, injured.

Police and witnesses said the BNP activists attacked Kazi Siraj as he along with his supporters reached Machkandi in a motorcade from Dhaka at about 9:40am, leaving the 20 people injured.

It was Kazi Siraj's first visit to the area after he crossed floor to join the BNP deserting Awami League on June 4. He was elected MP from Faridpur-1 constituency on Awami league ticket in the general elections in 2001.

Before the attack, police had advised Kazi Siraj to leave Machkandi without making any delay as angry Awami League workers gathered there since morning and were chanting slogans against him.

But Siraj ignored the police advice and stayed there for a while only to come under attack by the BNP activists, who were later joined by Awami League workers.

Police said traffic on the Dhaka-Khulna highway was disrupted for about two hours from 10:00am due to the trouble.

As the motorcade reached Alfadanga via Boalmari, the former MP and his supporters again came under attack by Awami League workers, who damaged at least three minibuses.

Police fired rubber bullets to disperse the angry AL activists.

Kazi Siraj could not make a halt at Boalmari due to protest by local people. On his way to Alfadanga from Boalmari, thousands of people on both sides of the road showed the former lawmaker shoes, brooms, sticks and black flags.

At Alfadanga, Siraj faced the wrath of angry Awami League workers. Later, police escorted him to Madhukali upazila headquarters.

## JS demands

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Hawa Bhaban are involved in it," AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil said after the parliamentary party meeting.

Meanwhile, ruling BNP lawmaker Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury in parliament demanded to initiate security measures at the other gas fields of the country.

Ruling coalition partner Jamaat-e-Islami lawmaker Shajahan Chowdhury raising a point of order demanded a statement from the minister for energy and mineral resources.

"It is an urgent situation as the fire in Tengratila gas field continues. The energy and mineral resources minister has not yet issued any statement on the matter in parliament. We want to know what is happening there," he said.

Responding to the lawmaker, Speaker Jamir Uddin Sircar said the energy and mineral resources minister can issue a statement if the minister wants.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia is in charge of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources.

Jatiya Party lawmaker Rawshan Ershad asked the government to take immediate measures to douse the fire in the gas field. She also wanted to know who is responsible for the damage of the precious natural resources and demanded a statement from the advisor to the energy and mineral resources ministry.

## Tk 2,600cr gas set

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the flames or limit the damage.

"The way the raging fire continues to go wider, I'm afraid the blowout might have driven the last nail in the coffin of the 260 billion cubic feet (bcf) gross reserve," Prof Badrul Imam of Department of Geology at Dhaka University told The Daily Star.

"And if that happens, the explorer will have no way but to eventually abandon the gas field," he said.

Experts both at Petrobangla and Bapex confirmed that the fire has already blazed out of Niko control and that the Canadian firm can only wait until the fire dies down exhausting the reserves or a miracle underground earth layer movement takes place to seal the gas leaks.

According to the estimates of the explorers, the gas reserves below the first layer at 550 metres are no less than 115bcf and the gas loss has been initially forecast at Tk 1,150 crore (\$185m).

But experts now fear that this major blowout might have destroyed the vast structure in its entirety, killing chances of further commercial extraction.

"The loss of gas reserves alone would be double than what has been predicted in the media. The 260bcf gross reserves will be no less than Tk 2,600 crore (\$322 million) at current market rate," a top Bapex official said, wishing anonymity in fear of possible wrath from a powerful lobby that has sided with Niko all the way to the disasters, environmental damage of which is yet to be assessed.

Geologists and drilling experts have no hesitation in singling out Niko for the twin Tengratila disasters and expressed shock at the strange reaction of energy ministry Adviser Mahmudur Rahman who blasted none but two local companies for monitoring failure before suspending two officials of Bapex--the partner of the highly controversial explorer Niko.

A Petrobangla expert said Niko committed the same crime twice, nakedly exposing their dubious credentials as explorers.

The first blowout took place due to faulty well design and wrong drilling while the second was the consequence of the post-blowout mishandling by Niko, he said.

He observed that Niko was too sluggish to drill a relief well after the first blowout on January 7, possibly turning about 100sqkm area around the structure into a virtual 'minefield' for any exploration.

A relief well should be drilled immediately, preferably within a week, after any blowout, Imam said.

But Niko sat on it for six months to let the gas channel through ground layers and then drilled the relief well up to 350 metres when a sudden kick from high-pressured gas pocket led to the blowout.

Imam, a leading exploration expert in the country, termed the sudden fluctuation in gas pressure all too natural after any blowout and

slammed Niko for its failure in handling the situation.

The structure of the main reserves 550 metres below the surface were understood to have been badly damaged in the first blowout. Worse still, gas spread through the soft sand layers above it, creating numerous gas pockets of varying pressures at different depths.

"Niko should have been expecting a major kick from the gas pockets all the time, and it had to have the capability to control any unwarranted situation," Imam said.

Niko has no excuse in their defence to justify its unprepared position, especially after the January experience with the Tengratila structure, he said. "You don't need to be an expert to know the existence of high-pressured gas pockets after such an accident."

Besides, Niko ignored a Petrobangla advice to drill relief well far away from the main well, he pointed out.

Though rallies and human chains across the country demanded immediate cancellation of the controversy-ridden agreement and Niko to pay dearly for its mistakes, Bapex and Petrobangla remained highly sceptical about the government acting wisely to protect national interests.

"The government did not go tough on Niko after the first blowout although investigations held it solely responsible for the accident. All investigations this time will also embrace the same fate. The prompt suspension of two Bapex staffs what we say morning shows the day," said a top ex-Bapex staff. "Powerful friends will surely help Niko get off the hook once again."

The plundering of Tengratila reminds many geologists of the blowout way back in 1955 at the Sylhet Gas Field. The explorer, Pakistan Petroleum Ltd, had then failed to manage the post-blowout situation and it could not even plug the well, leaving a highly rich gas field on its deathbed.

"Gas still oozes from that well after all these decades and you can even light a fire there. We take our students there for study tours every year," said Imam.

And, thanks to Niko, a horde of geology students may well flock to Tengratila in the future to witness the grave of what once happened to be a promising gas field as a case study.

## 1,670 acres

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The railway authorities held 1,376 officials responsible for the accidents and took punitive measures against them, the minister mentioned.

Replying to another question, he said the communications ministry has taken different steps to control road accidents.

## AL lawmakers protest

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black money must be withdrawn," he said.

Jalil said the government has allocated money for the Gram Sarkar in a bid to plunder public money by their party men. "We demanded that the allocation should be made