

Hartal clashes leave

FROM PAGE 1
attacked 14-party leaders and workers when they tried to bring out processions in Mohakhali, Paltan, Sadarghat, Russell Square, Noor Hossain Square and Mirpur areas. Witnesses said.

A procession of Jubo Mahila League (JML) came under police action as it tried to move on despite the police barricades at Paltan intersection. At least eight workers were injured there and 10 were picked up by police.

The JML again tried to bring out a procession in Baitul Mukarram mosque area but police chased them away. Police also foiled a JML bid to bring out a procession near the Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) office and arrested three workers.

Police intercepted an AL procession at Paltan intersection at about 6:30am. The participants then sang patriotic songs protesting the police barricade. Motia Chowdhury, Mohammad Nasim, Obaidul Quader, Jahangir Kabir, Nanak and Mirza Azam were present there.

Later, police allowed the procession to go to Noor Hossain Square where they held a rally despite the hartal.

General Secretary Abdul Jalil later joined the rally. Jalil, also coordinator of the 14-party combine, reiterated the demands for which the shutdown was enforced.

Other leaders including Tofail Ahmed, Motia Chowdhury, Hasanul Haque Inu, Obaidul Quader, Mofazzel Hossain Chowdhury, Masa and Asaduzzaman Noor also spoke.

Jubo Mahila League Lalbagh branch unit President Asma fainted as a brickbat hit her. She was rushed to Samarita Hospital and then shifted to a trauma centre at Mohammadpur.

At about 10:30am, AL Parliamentary Party and different front organisations of the party brought out a joint procession and held a rally at Russell Square. Chaired by Mohammad Nasim, the rally was addressed by Abdur Razzaq, Abdul Mannan, Abdus Shaheed, Col (retired) Faruk Khan, Dr Abdur Razzaq, Prof Abu Sayeed and Dr Hasan Mahmud, among others.

They blasted the government for continued price hike of essentials, electricity, diesel and fuel, and killing of farmers at Kansat in Chapainawabganj recently.

Police dispersed an AL procession led by former AL lawmaker Rahmatullah at about 8:00am. Four BCL leaders of Titumir College unit were injured there.

Witnesses said police and pickets clashed in Mirpur section-10 at about 8:00am. At least 20 AL leaders and workers, including Kamal Ahmed Majumdar and Shahida Tareque Dipi were injured. Police picked up seven workers from the spot.

Three AL leaders were detained in Mirpur Section-1 in the morning.

At least five people were injured as police charged batons on an AL procession led by Asaduzzaman Noor at Dainik Bangla intersection.

Police charged batons and detained at least 10 JSD leaders and workers from a party procession near its central office.

Besides, police picked up seven workers from the spot.

Sadarghat area left at least five people injured. Police action on an AL procession at Hazaribagh injured three.

Moreover, at least five BCL leaders including Hemayet Hossain, Abdul Alim and Delwar were wounded in police-picket clash at Sabahbagh intersection and Jagannath University (JU) unit BCL President Qamrul Hasan Ripon and nine others were injured in such a clash on the campus.

About 8,000 law enforcers were deployed at different points in the capital to maintain law and order during the hartal hours.

In Narayanganj, District AL Convener SM Akram, town unit AL President Anwar Hossain and eight others were injured during chase and counter-chase between 14-party leaders and activists, and police, our correspondent reports.

ACROSS THE COUNTRY
Our Sirajganj correspondent reports: At least 17 hartal supporters were injured in a clash between supporters of the AL and the BNP at Meghabazar in Kazipur upazila.

There, four with critical injuries were rushed to Sirajganj Sadar Hospital and others were admitted to Kazipur Health Complex.

Police took to baton charge to bring the situation under control.

Al activists ransacked three shops and damaged six buses at Hatikumul of Solonga.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports: More than 25 people, including five cops, were injured in a clash between hartal supporters and police at Bonpara.

Police picked up six pickets and filed a case against 22.

Russia

FROM PAGE 20
"I don't see anything extraordinary in this delay," Moskhalo said. "There was a lot of fuss about nothing."

In Moscow, Russia's Foreign Ministry said it could not immediately confirm the date for the talks.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, in Vienna for talks with senior EU officials, reiterated Moscow's opposition to sanctions against Iran, saying Wednesday that he did not believe that "in the case of Iran sanctions will achieve something," Interfax reported.

A leading Russian lawmaker, Konstantin Kosachev, warned Tuesday that time was running out for Iran to respond to the offer, which is meant to establish international oversight of Iran's nuclear fuel production and ensure it can't be misused to make weapons.

Segei Kiriyenko, head of Russia's Atomic Energy Agency, will travel to Iran next week to visit the Bushehr nuclear power plant Russia is building, Interfax reported, citing his office.

Last year, Iran and Russia signed a nuclear fuel agreement that paved the way for the 1,000-megawatt power plant to go online by mid-2006. The contract is valued at more than \$800 million.

Russia, a traditional ally of Iran, backed referral to the U.N. Security Council only on condition that the council take up the issue no earlier than March, and it opposed the U.S. push for international sanctions against Iran.

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Maid found dead in bathroom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The body of a teenage domestic help was recovered from the Cantonment house of a Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) official on Tuesday night while aggrieved family members of the deceased, right activists and locals termed the incident as a murder after violation.

Agitated people yesterday demonstrated in front of the Rab official's house protesting the girl's death.

The dead, Rehana Akhtar, 15, daughter of boatman Hossain Miah of Bancharampur upazila in Brahmanbaria, had been working at the house of Rab Captain Jainul Abedin for the last eight months.

"Failing to get her [Rehana] response, we broke into the toilet and found her hanging with her scarf from the shower on Tuesday evening," her employer told police.

She was rushed to Combined Military Hospital (CMH) where doctors declared her dead, said police.

Rehana's elder sister Jahanara Akhtar alleged that Rehana was raped and murdered.

Police inquest report said the body had bruises in the neck, and reddish marks on the jaw, right elbow and back.

Captain Jainul, however, denied the allegations against his family saying that the girl committed suicide in any time of Tuesday in the bathroom of his house. "We did our best to save the girl after finding her in the toilet and rushed her to the CMH," the captain told The Daily Star over phone last evening.

"We do not know anything about the reason behind her committing suicide," he said.

Some Rab members also held Rehana's cousin Mamun from Bhasanteek slum Tuesday night and released him later, said Jahanara Akhtar.

Police sent the body to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. Morgue authorities have sent her limbs for viscerareport.

Bangladesh Mohila Parishad city unit will hold protest programme at Bhasanteek Bazar today afternoon.

Dhaka-Islamabad

FROM PAGE 1
Pakistan government also agreed to increase scholarships for Bangladeshi students from 75 to 100 annually for higher studies in Pakistan.

Asked about the possibility of signing bilateral FTA with India, he said Bangladesh will sign such a deal with any country wherever the country's business interests will be protected.

The foreign minister said both the countries have agreed to take necessary steps to expand the bilateral trade to one \$ 1 billion in next two to three years.

About fighting terrorism, the foreign minister said the leaders of both the countries have agreed not to allow the rise of militancy in the name of Islam and also to face the vile campaign against Islam, a religion of peace and tolerance. The two sides agreed to strengthen OIC to achieve this.

On Saarc, Morshed said the two sides agreed to implement the decisions so far taken by the Saarc leaders. He mentioned that the standing committee comprising foreign secretaries of the member states will meet in Dhaka in April to make recommendations on how to strengthen the Saarc secretariat and evolve modalities to raise fund for implementation of the Saarc projects.

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The Saarc foreign ministers will sit for an interim meeting to take decision on the recommendations of the standing committee.

Terminating the prime minister's visit fruitful, the foreign minister said the two sides had constructive and productive discussions that would help strengthen bilateral relations and cooperation in every field.

Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin and senior officials of the foreign ministry were present at the briefing.

ADP

FROM PAGE 20
extension of BDR Hospital are ready for approval.

Criticising the delay in procurement process in his ministry, the state minister directed the officials concerned to quicken the process to attain the goal by the end of the current FY.

He instructed immediate completion of procurement process of different instruments, machinery, police vehicles, speedboats and ships.

Babar came down heavily on the PWD officials for their non-cooperative attitude to implement the ADP projects in due time and causing excessive expenditure.

The prison officials told the minister that the PWD demanded Tk 66 lakh for repair works of a Dhaka Central Jail wall, which should not require more than Tk 50.7 lakh.

They also alleged that the PWD officials were not working in compliance with the priority set by the department concerned.

Babar told the PWD officials to stop the "unacceptable practice".

PM

FROM PAGE 1
leader of the House does not attend the House regularly. This parliament has no deputy leader who can act in her absence," Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina told a briefing on Tuesday, after a walkout.

SITTING TO CONTINUE

The Business Advisory Committee (BAC) of parliament sits today to take a decision about extension of the current session. As per the previous decision of the BAC, the House is scheduled to be prorogued today.

The treasury bench had requested the speaker to call the BAC meeting as the main opposition party returned to the House ending their 17-month boycott and demanded extension of the session's duration.

"The microfinance industry in Bangladesh has the potential of further expansion by increasing the outreach, by expanding areas of services and types of products. Time has come for scaling up the microfinance into micro and small enterprises," he added.

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Diesel price increase

FROM PAGE 1
addition to the diesel's scarcity and high price that left the fuel-run pumps inoperative, the farmers could neither run the electric pumps due to an acute shortage of power supply.

Against a required 450MW for 18 northern districts, a record low of 136MW electricity was available on Tuesday while the daily average supply remains as low as 225MW.

This has forced many boro-growers in these districts to convert their power-run pumps into diesel-run ones, bearing the extra cost of high diesel price.

Meanwhile, things have gone worse at field levels in different northern districts.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reported of alleged smuggling of diesel in the bordering districts. Boats loaded with a large number of 500-litre drums of diesel were seen sailing across the Padma towards India on Tuesday night. Although traders said those were for cultivation on the shoals, sources claimed that the number of oil-filled drums is thrice higher than the local demand.

Corruption also deepened centring the makeshift fuel depot at Kazinhat in Pabna, sources alleged.

Our Bogra correspondent reported that some dealers obtained diesel from the government depot at Tk 5,836 per barrel and sold at black market at Tk 6,836.

Demanding adequate fuel supply, several hundred farmers in Thakurgaon laid siege to eight fuel stations on Tuesday night, reports our correspondent in Dinajpur.

"We are ready to pay the additional price but ensure us adequate fuel to maintain smooth irrigation," pleaded farmer Kamal of Birupala in Dinajpur.

The acute shortage of power supply has meantime increased the daily demand of diesel to irrigate boro fields in greater Dinajpur from 2,000 litres to 2,700 litres.

Farmers in Bogra and Naogaon districts, already in trouble due to low power supply, are fearing further cut in power supply as the government decided to host the two Bangladesh-Sri Lanka one-day cricket matches on

February 19 and 20 at the Bogra stadium under floodlights.

Superintendent Engineer of Barind Development Authority Khalequzzaman feared that four lakh hectares of land would remain out of cultivation in the northern region because of the diesel and power crises.

One-third boro crops on over 10.5 lakh hectare land might be damaged as farmers failed to irrigate the fields, he told our Rajshahi reporter yesterday. Nearly 700 deep tube wells also went out of order due to voltage fluctuation, he said.

The diesel was selling at around Tk 40 at the outskirts of Rajshahi city and in all its nine upazilas yesterday. Rafiqul, a farmer of Pabna upazila, said he bought diesel at Tk 38 from a petrol pump in Nawthata.

Pump official Mizan said they were charging higher as they had to spend higher to collect the fuel from the depots.

After withdrawing the price hike decision, Energy Adviser Mahmudur Rahman yesterday expressed annoyance for not maintaining proper navigability of the rivers that hampered the smooth supply from Baghabari. Had the navigability been maintained, the question of additional transport cost would not come, he said.

Meanwhile, the problem of fertilizer distribution also added to the farmers' worry in some areas.

Our Jessor correspondent reports: Several hundred farmers from different villages under Islai union in Jessor sadar upazila yesterday confined Union Chairman Motlib Biswas for an hour demanding fertiliser.

The district administration and Jessor district General Secretary of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association Zahid Hasan Tukun rushed to the spot with police and brought the situation under control. They freed the chairman and assured the farmers of smooth supply of fertiliser.

US-INDIA AGREEMENT

New Delhi allowed to expand nuclear arms

REUTERS, Washington

A landmark new US-India nuclear agreement would enable New Delhi to expand atomic weapons production and encourage Pakistan and China to do likewise, according to critics of the controversial deal.

In analyses to be made public on Wednesday, non-proliferation experts expressed grave concerns about a proposed "separation" plan that would open India's civil nuclear facilities to UN inspections, while permitting military facilities to remain off-limits.

The plan is central to whether the US-India nuclear deal, agreed last July, goes forward. US business leaders say the deal could open the door to billions of dollars in non-nuclear and civilian nuclear-related contracts while government officials say the agreement commits India to play a larger role in halting the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

But the two governments are at odds over details, and it is unclear if they can reach agreement before President George W. Bush visits New Delhi in early March.

But even if the Bush administration deemed the plan credible and all civilian facilities were placed under permanent international monitoring, the sale of US and other foreign fuel to India "would still free up India's existing capacity to produce plutonium and highly enriched uranium for weapons and allow for the rapid expansion of India's nuclear arsenal," the

experts said in a memo to the US Congress obtained by Reuters.

"A sober analysis reveals the non-proliferation benefits of the original proposal are overstated and the damage to the non-proliferation regime is potentially high," said the memo, prepared by Daryl Kimball of the Arms Control Association and five others.

For 30 years, the United States led the effort to deny India nuclear technology because it tested and developed nuclear weapons in contravention of international norms. Both India and its neighbor and nuclear-armed rival Pakistan have refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty.

But Bush now views India, a rising democratic and economic power on China's border, as an evolving US ally