

Raid in B'baria

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The investigators, meantime, said from now on they will feed the media with information related to operations only as they have instructions from the government top level not to disclose the findings of interrogation of the top JMB leaders.

The law enforcers also prevented photojournalists from taking photographs of the arrested JMB men during and after the operation in Brahmanbaria.

The law enforcers are yet to begin interrogation of Bangla Bhai who is undergoing treatment for burn and splinter injuries he had received during his capture on March 6 in Mytensingh.

Before starting the interrogation, the investigators will have to produce the militant before the court and obtain remand order.

BRAHMANBARIA
Our Brahmanbaria correspondent reports: On information from JMB cadre Sabbir Ahmed Dulal arrested at Palltan in the capital on March 8, the police and Rab-9 cordoned off Kazipara, Kandipara, Collegepara and adjacent places in the town at 3:00am yesterday and started a door-to-door search.

JMB operatives Sohel, 25, of Gokhar village of Akhaura, Alamgir, 28, of Mohammadpur village, and Arafat, 26, of Bhadughar village, were arrested during the raid.

The three admitted to their involvement in the August 17 bomb blasts in the town.

"Sohel admitted that he knew about the August 17 bombing a few days prior to the attack," said a police source. The financial support for carrying out bombings at five points in Brahmanbaria was also provided via Sohel, the source added.

The law enforcers also picked up a local astrologer named Sukumar Roy for quizzing.

In the evening, the Rab and police members deployed at different points of the town arrested one Sheikh Mohammad Sumon, 25, at Kautoli in the town.

SHERPUR
Members of the Detective Branch (DB) of police arrested JMB district commander Mozahidul Islam Sumon, 30, in Gourdar area of Nakla upazila in the early hours of yesterday, reports our Sherpur correspondent.

In another raid, sadar thana police arrested JMB Ehsar (full-

time) member Abu Syed alias Sumon, 28, raiding Nagpara village of Sherpur municipality.

The police produced the two before a first class magistrate's court with a remand petition. The court granted a 10-day police remand for them each.

Mozahidul, an accused of the August 17 serial bomb blasts in Sherpur, was a close aide of the JMB chief and would accompany him on his visit to Jamalpur and Sherpur.

The police were interrogating both the two JMB operatives last night.

Private sector

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Chittagong Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CCCI) at Hotel Peninsula in the port city.

She said the services (management and operation) of Chittagong Port should go for privatisation.

"Chittagong Port will have to be changed into a modern and competitive organisation to avail the scope for internationalising the city," the US envoy suggested.

Chammas said expansion of Chittagong Export Processing Zone (CEPZ) is a must because a total of \$ 4,000 million has already been invested in 420 plots. "Such kind of growth is encouraging."

She also assured more cooperation with the chamber so that more US investment could come in Chittagong. She praised the government for taking initiative to hand over the management of Chittagong airport to private sector.

Speaking on the occasion, CCCI President Saifuzzaman Chowdhury Javed sought cooperation from the charge d'affaires for duty and quota-free access of Bangladeshi garments to US market.

Javed also sought sincere cooperation from political leaders for political stability to ensure country's economic development.

Reiterating his demand for privatising Chittagong Port, the business leader said private sector is the pillar of economic development.

As part of her busy schedule in the port city, the US diplomat visited Chittagong court in the morning and held a meeting with the judges. She enquired about the security of judges after the arrest of militants.

Govt approves

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But it was not renewed since 2001 and trade between the countries is being carried out by extension of it on short-term ad hoc basis.

A highly placed source at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday told The Daily Star the cabinet approved the renewal amid objection by a senior minister, who argued for adding an arbitration clause. However, the arbitration clause was not added to the to-be-renewed agreement.

The PMO source said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia also approved the agreement yesterday.

The government however dropped the riverine transit from the trade accord that was previously a part of it.

"We want the riverine transit to be included in another accord," said a high official asking not to be named.

"The long-term two years renewal of the trade agreement is a test case... we are ready to sign it for five or more years if India gives Bangladesh trade concession by withdrawing various tariff, para-tariff and non-tariff," the official added.

India has long been asking Bangladesh for renewal of the agreement on a long-term basis.

Officials said Bangladesh and India are likely to sign two more agreements on investment protection and avoidance of double taxation during the premier's visit.

They said the accord on investment protection is seen as crucial to enhance possibilities of Indian investment in Bangladesh. Leaders of Indian business and industries community have also been pressing for such an agreement.

Sources said Indian entrepreneurs are keen to invest in certain areas, particularly in textile and steel sectors, and their interest in investing in Bangladesh could be spurred by the investment protection treaty.

The sources said negotiations are on between the officials of the two neighbouring countries to finalise the agreements on avoidance of double taxation and investment protection. They are hopeful to complete the negotiations before the upcoming visit of the prime minister.

for the building collapse incident in Tejaon, Titas gas office for poor supply of gas and Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) for mosquitoes and unclean drains, Maya added.

14-party leaders including Mostafa Mohsin Montu, Hazi Mohammad Selim, Omar Ali, Mukul Chowdhury, Faiz Uddin, Qamrul Islam, Shah Alam Murad, Saidur Rahman, Shafiqur Rahman and Qamrul Ahsan attended the meeting among others.

Additional law enforcers will be deployed throughout the Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue to avert any untoward incidents.

On March 6, the 14-party laid siege to the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) protesting the unprecedented power crisis in the capital and most of the parts of the country.

US suspends

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The Peace Corps made the decision following a careful assessment of Bangladesh's prevailing security environment, and did not base its conclusions on any single threat or incident, the statement said.

The US Embassy, however, made it clear that security situation in Bangladesh will be periodically reviewed to determine whether to end or continue the suspension of Peace Corps programme in the country.

It further stated, "We have welcomed the capture of Abdur Rahman and Bangla Bhai of the [Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh] as significant steps forward in the campaign against terrorism and extremism. Ironically, one consequence of that success is concern over possible reprisal attacks against Americans or other Western nationals by JMB activists still at large."

Prior to the suspension decision, US Embassy officials told The Daily Star that there were as many as 71 Peace Corps volunteers mostly teaching English language in various districts.

Earlier, American Centre Director Jonathan Cebra told The Daily Star that most of the Peace Corps volunteers had already left their respective workstations for Dhaka.

The Peace Corps programme, starting in Bangladesh in 1998, was once suspended for some time in late 2001.

In addition to the primary assignment of teaching English, the Peace Corps volunteers provide assistance to environmental organisations, indigenous peoples' groups and community English resource centres.

Petrobangla

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Tulloo bought the exploration rights from the blocks' original operator Oakland in 1999. The Irish company drilled a couple of exploratory wells in the blocks but failed to strike anything significant.

Oakland signed the Production Sharing Contract (PSC) with Petrobangla back in January '97 with very relaxed terms and conditions.

Later the PSC for these blocks were extended twice despite Tulloo failed to fulfil the contractual commitments.

Petrobangla will forward its approval to the energy ministry for its approbation, sources said.

Militants

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Most of the ehsar [fulltime activists] members of outlawed Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB), even several district or regional commanders, arrested so far are hardly 18 to 20. Two ehsar members held last year in Natore were only 16.

Even young members of the militant leaders' families were not spared from being brainwashed. JMB supremo Abdur Rahman's sons took part in militant operations when they were only 14.

Mahmud alias Ashraf, Rahman's second son, was 14 when he took part in Bagmara operations in 2004. "Motivating the young ones is not only easy. They are also better subject for training and become much more skilled than adults," said a source close to JMB.

Young activists are so tactfully indoctrinated that they do not bother sacrificing their lives or go for any kind of missions they are assigned to, the source added.

The fanatical comment that Rahman's eldest son Nabil made -- "Give me an AK47, I'll kill you all," -- to Rab after his arrest in Comilla proves such motivation.

JMB leaders used to recruit members mainly from madrasas, while some others admitted to be former members of Islami Chhatra Shibir, Ahle Hadith Andolan, Bangladesh (Ahab) and Ahle Hadith Jubo Sangha (AHJS).

Mahmud, being Rahman's son, had the opportunity to receive training from JMB second-in-command Bangla Bhai, who used to keep him around during his operations.

"Look at our junior Mujahid," Bangla Bhai told journalists in 2004 while introducing Mahmud with a green turban. "He is so lucky to have the opportunity to take part in the way of sacrificing life for Allah."

"Bangla Bhai is my commander. I came to eliminate the outlaws. I will stay here as long as it takes," was the humble reply of Mahmud, who was guarding the gate of the press conference with a hockey stick in hand.

Disaster

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The residents, however, again started living in the building after 20 days.

Constructed in early sixties, the buildings have developed cracks and holes in every floor and most of the verandas have broken down. The residents have repaired some damaged stairs with bamboo and wood.

They have even propped up some of the roofs with bamboo.

"We have sent many letters to the authorities concerned but no step has been taken," Wali Muhammad, president of Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee said.

The government has to take the responsibility in case of any casualties, he added.

"Where will we go? As we have no other alternatives and the authorities are not rehabilitating us, we are leaving in this highly risky building with our children and other family members," said Md Abid, a resident of building no 4, who lives with his 11-member family in a 12X10 feet room.

EC delegation urges

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ings' by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and questioned the government's explanation on this issue.

There is a question mark about the government's explanation on these extra-judicial killings," said Herve Jouanjean, EC deputy director general for external relations.

Jouanjean, who led the EC delegation, was speaking at a joint press briefing at the end of third meeting of the EC-Bangladesh Joint Commission at the Economic Relations Division.

The joint commission co-chaired by Jouanjean and ERD Secretary Ismail Zabihullah had an intensive exchange of views on governance and human rights, and issued a joint communique on conclusion of the two-day meet.

"The EC welcomes the recent arrest by the authorities of two suspected terrorist leaders -- Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai and Abdur Rahman. This is a significant achievement, which demonstrates Bangladesh's strong commitment to the fight against terrorism," said the communique, read out by Zabihullah.

"The EU calls on the authorities to ensure that these individuals will be brought to justice in an open and transparent manner," it added.

Jouanjean, responsible for Asia and Latin America, said what happens in Bangladesh matters in the European Union (EU) and what happens in the EU also matters in Bangladesh as 'we are in a very small world'.

"We requested the government to fight against terrorism as it is a problem for your country and it is a problem for EU as well," he said. "We have expressed our views on different areas and the government listened with softness."

Zabihullah defended the government's explanation on the issue of 'extra-judicial killings', saying the EC delegation was briefed on the basis of a statement by the ministry concerned.

There are no extra judicial killings. This is a case of deaths during encounter with the accused. There is rule of law and we have constitutional guarantee for it," he said. Law takes its own course if there is any extra judicial killing, he mentioned.

"I requested them (EC team) to raise the issues that are purely of political nature at other forums but they did not do so. They expressed their concern at the meeting," Zabihullah said.

The EC delegation also requested for every effort to ensure that the next parliamentary election is free and fair. It expressed its readiness to send an EU election observer team.

The Bangladesh side stressed that the government is committed to holding the next national election in a free and fair manner.

"We had constructive words in the discussion. But difficult questions cannot be resolved at one go," Jouanjean said.

The EC delegation welcomed the government move to place in parliament a bill for separation of the judiciary from the executive. It also hailed Bangladesh's anti-trafficking programmes and measures for empowerment of the disadvantaged.

It presented an outline of its future country strategy for Bangladesh that will cover 2007-2013. From 2007, the EC intends to focus its grants to Bangladesh on human and social development through support to health and education sectors, on good governance, and on supporting economic development, the joint communique said.

The EC also intends to focus on steps to help Bangladesh integrate into the world trade system in a way, which increases income and employment for the poor, it added.

Bangla Bhai

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Fartul's house and hacked his father Mozafar to death in July 2001.

Locals said Mahtab took shelter at Talgharia police camp and raised a 300-strong force to resort to crimes with the help of law enforcers.

Years after, the police pressed charges against Aziz Master in Mahtab's brothers' killing cases, although he was not named in the first information report.

In April 2004, Mahtab and his forces joined Bangla Bhai-led Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB). As the Islamist outfit was banned, he worked as a Rab source.

Bangla Bhai, Mahtab and their group abducted Aziz on May 1, 2004 and took him to JMJB Hamirkutsa camp at Rajakar Ramjan Kaya's house.

After two hours of torture, Aziz was released with his hands and legs broken, shoulders mauled and backbone fractured.

He received treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for over two months but was not fully cured and could not walk properly.

However, Rab personnel picked him up from his house around 2:00am on January 1 last year.

A witness said Mahtab and his

cadres Nurul Islam [now behind the bars], Mozahar and Shahjahan Imran were present during Rab action.

The same day the Rab issued a press release saying Abul Aziz, 45, regional founding president of PBPC and accused in two murder cases, was killed in so-called crossfire.

"Aziz could not even walk properly, how did he run to flee from the Rab custody?" said a family member asking not to be named.

Aziz's father got secluded after the killing and died of a heart attack on March 7. His family said the Rab, being biased to Mahtab, killed him.

He had no links with outlaws, but had animosity towards some of the outlaws, who later joined the JMJB, family sources said.

Witnesses said a Rab vehicle stopped by Aziz's grave one night and some of the elite force offered prayers.

The Rab on November 27 last year picked up Mahtab for his alleged role in the murders of Monwar Hossain Bader, Golam Rabbani Mukul and Diponkor Roy. But the elite force released him within hours apparently following a ministerial diktat.

Housewife to cringe

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crossfire, I spent the night walking on the balcony watching in fear the main road," she said.

"I am diabetic and as per doctors' advice I walk up to five kilometres a day. On the day, as usual I put on my trainers and took my son Momin to his Dhanmondi Boys' School just opposite Road 27 and decided to walk back home when I saw, for the first time in my life, the water cannons," she said.

When suddenly clashes between the police and the pickets erupted there, Shanta took shelter in the nearby hospital. A group of policemen and policemen entered the hospital, grabbed her by the hair, dragged her out on the street and unleashed their violent anger on her. As senior police officers watched and a host of media men recorded the incident, a group of policemen and policemen encircled her and beat her mercilessly. They dragged her onto a nearby prison van and beat her inside.

"Later a police officer asked the names of my father and my husband and told me to come out of the van, but fearing another round of beating I refused to budge from the van," Shanta said.

The police officer then led her out of the van and entered a bank premises nearby where she was asked to sign a blank paper. She said she hardly had any strength left in her body at that point and does not remember what she might have written. She was then asked to leave the area.

"On the day my husband, who is a lawyer, was out of Dhaka for work, when a young man brought me home on a rickshaw. I was almost dead. The police had taken my gold chain and bangles, my money and my mobile phone. When I arrived home only our gatekeeper was there to help me. The gatekeeper tried to reach my husband but he was out of the range of phone network," Shanta said.

On his way back to Dhaka, Shanta's husband Supreme Court Advocate Atiar Rahman stopped for tea at a restaurant. As he watched the TV news, he recognised Shanta being beaten up. "It was after midnight when he rushed back home and took me to the hospital," she said.

Shahin Sultana Shanta, on

Construction yet another

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mills fifth with 9 deaths and 40 injuries.

An identical study by the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies reports in 2004 construction topped the list of workplace casualties in industrial sectors with 69 deaths and 78 injuries, followed by garment with 25 deaths and 107 injuries, and ship-breaking third by eight deaths and five injuries. That rice mill was in fourth position with six deaths and 17 injuries, closely followed by road transport with six deaths and four injuries, while mining, shop and hotel sectors each saw four workers die in workplace mishaps.

The rest of the sectors where poor safety measures cause frequent casualties but that have little or no provisions for compensation include bakery, power, paper mill, brick kiln, sawmill, jute mill, rubber, tobacco and metal works.

Mohsin Mia bitterly criticises media for "covering only the big

AL demands

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government is not sincere about discussing the reform proposals. "The chief whip has not tried to make such proposal. He (Delwar) himself is a controversial person."

Kader also questioned the prime minister's sincerity about the proposed dialogue. The PM has already rejected the opposition demand for reforms terming it 'unrealistic' and said their proposals were not placed in parliament as per the rules, he mentioned.

AL Organising Secretary Saber Hossain Chowdhury said the prime minister's proposal regarding formation of a committee is not clear. She has to clarify whether it will comprise only lawmakers of both the sides or political leaders.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on February 28 in her valedictory speech at the last parliament session proposed formation of a committee to discuss the proposed reforms, without explaining.

Two weeks later, the chief whip talked to Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid and proposed to sit for a formal discussion with the opposition to form the committee.

The AL meeting demanded Interpol investigation into militancy and interrogation of the militants' patrons including some ministers and MPs by it.

It protested 'police atrocities' on Shamim Sultana Shanta on March 12 and demanded an impartial probe and stern action against those responsible.

The meeting also protested Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal's attack on the demonstrator students at Eden University College and condemned the principal's role in handling the situation.

Expressing deep concern over the recurring price hike of essentials, the meeting said the government has no right to cling to power in such a situation.

AL presidium member Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Organising Secretary Abdur Rahman were also present at the press briefing.

BNP leaders

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because BNP wants to discuss the opposition's reform demand. "The terms and reference can be settled once the committee is formed. There is no scope of getting specific,"

The minister hoped the opposition will sit for discussion to work out a solution. "The government is absolutely sincere about the dialogue. The way the opposition is placing one condition after another, people doubt if they are really willing to sit for discussion."

"It seems that another committee will have to be formed for specifying the proposals," Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury MP, parliamentary affairs adviser to the prime minister, told The Daily Star. "It is already specified. They have spelt out what they want to discuss. What do they actually mean by specifying? Are they really interested in discussion?"

Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain on Tuesday talked to the deputy leader of the opposition and the opposition chief whip and conveyed the ruling party's proposal for a formal discussion to form the committee that will discuss the opposition-proposed reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission.

Despite repeated attempts the chief whip could not be reached for his comment.

Case against

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of the case immediately.

Metropolitan Magistrate Shamsul Alam passed the order saying that since the IO did not submit the probe report of the case under section 173 of the Criminal Procedure Code, he is being instructed to do so immediately.

The case was filed under the Explosive Substances Act with Tejaon Police Station on August 17 last year.

On March 9, another court directed investigation officer (IO) of two cases filed against Sunny and six others with Sabujbagh Police Station to submit the probe reports immediately.

Other accused are -- operations commander of banned Harkatul Jihadi's (Huji) Bangladesh chapter Mufti Abdul Hannan, JMB regional commander of Gazipur Enayet Ullah alias Jewel, assistant security officer of the parliament secretariat Babul Ansari, Tozammur Ali, Gausuddin Al Azad, Mizanur Rahman, Azizul Haq, Saimun alias Jewel and Nurul Islam Zobayer.

All of them have been arrested and are in the jail custody.

events. If one worker dies at his workplace, it is no big news and so is not covered. It also helps the employer deprive the dead worker's family of due or any compensation at all."

He also comes down heavily on the government for never taking any steps to reduce the accidents in these unsafe sectors.

ACASE STUDY
The February 25 Phoenix Fabrics building collapse in the city's Tejaon Industrial Area clearly demonstrates the wretched condition the construction workers are in.

Mizanur Rahman, 22, a painter, is one of the 22 ill-starred construction crew killed in that infamous accident, which also injured more than 50 others.

His wife Shefali, 17, a garment factory worker, found his decomposed body two days after the disaster. But, she has no idea to whom to turn for justice and compensation for the death caused by wilful violations of building and safety codes and some other laws.

The autopsy report says Mizan died from a heavy blow on the right side of his head and face crushing his jaw and skull.

Both Mizan and Shefali married two years ago hail from Rajpur Village of Jhalakathi. When asked if she wants to file a case against the building's owner, the teenage wife says, "I don't know how to do that." She studied up to class VIII at a rural madrasa.

On this point, Mohammad Bachchu Mia says, "See, if we file a case against the building's owner, we'll have to run it for years. But, we don't have that kind of money."

Bachchu is the general secretary of Bangladesh Construction Workers Federation's Tejaon unit. He also points out that "The caretaker of the building told us they won't give any compensation if we file any case against them. So, we think it's better to get a few thousand taka from the owner than going for a lawsuit."

The report of a Rajdhani Unnayan Kartipakkha (Rajuk)

Eden in chaos

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all through the night on the street'.

A student said incidents of kicking out residential students from their rooms occur frequently but a movement takes place only when a large scale forced eviction happens.

Earlier when Prof Dilara Hafiz, former principal of the college, along with some other teachers took stand against the misdeeds of JCD leaders, they had to quit the college due to pressure from the government high-ups.

The students and some JCD activists said most of the Eden College JCD leaders earned a huge amount of money in the last four years in collusion with the college administration and their party leaders.

The students' demands include punishment for the JCD leaders involved in the illegal business on campus.

A reliable JCD source said almost all the rooms in a newly constructed dormitory scheduled to open soon are already captured by the JCD leaders as they had taken advance payments from the freshers to book seats for them.

JCD cadres were guarding the dormitories and the campus yesterday although the authorities had officially vacated the dormitories. They also beat a student who came to take an exam for her Masters course.

Sources said the cadres were staying at Razia Sultana Hall till filling of this report at 8:00pm yesterday.

JCD'S VERSION
Afrin Johan Sina, who claimed to be a joint convener of the Eden College unit of JCD, told The Daily Star that there are also factional feuds within JCD and her faction is no longer involved in the illicit business. She, however, said some of the leaders of the other faction might be involved in such practices.

Shafiqul Bari Babu, general secretary of the central committee of JCD, said his organisation has no activity at Eden College. He termed the recent

probe committee says the building collapsed due to its weak foundation and illegal expansion -- a wilful violation of the safety laws.

After the tragedy, Tejaon police filed a criminal case against Deen Mohammad, chairman of Phoenix Group that owns the building, charging him with wilful violation of safety measures, among other things.

Detective Branch of police Deputy Director Shafiqul Islam says they are still investigating the case and "it would take some time before we can submit the charge sheet, as we've to collect the documents related to the building."

Meanwhile, the workers injured in the mishap are suffering from lack of money to bear the treatment costs.

"I've received only 2,000 taka. A woman from the owner's house came to the hospital [Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH)] and gave me the money for medical expenses. Others also got the same amount," informs Mohammad Musa, an apprentice plumber injured in the accident.

Musa was wounded in his chest, waist and head. There were some internal injuries at his waist needing a lengthy treatment. Now he comes to the Tejaon office of Bangladesh Construction Workers Federation every day in the hope that it may do something to help.

DMCH morgue sources said they often get bodies of people whose families do not have the money to take the body back to their homes.

"It needs at least 1,700 taka to buy a coffin, white cloth and chemicals to process the body for transportation. Families of some dead workers are also among such poor ones and they often hand over the bodies to Anzuman Mofidul Islam," a morgue staff says, adding most of them are construction workers and plumbers.

incidents on the campus as 'a prevailing problem between the administration and the students' and said, "The administration has to resolve it."

He said JCD expects that the college authorities will accept the general students' demands to bring back congenial atmosphere on the campus.

AUTHORITIES' VERSION
Regarding the students' demand for resignation of the college principal for her failure to take action against corrupt student leaders, Prof Feroza Begum, principal of the college, said, "I can't just resign based on a few students' demand!"

When asked whether JCD cadres were still living in the dormitories even after the college authorities vacated them, she denied the allegation terming it false and baseless.

Talking to journalists the principal said an evil force is trying to destroy congenial atmosphere on the campus in a planned way.