

Undemocratic leadership led democracy to near-collapse

Says Mainul
STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Adviser Barrister Mainul Hosein yesterday said undemocratic politics and leadership have led the country's democracy towards near-collapse.

"This kind of politics can neither revive democracy nor protect it," Mainul said.

He was speaking at the publication ceremony of three books by Brig Gen (ret'd) Sakhawat Hossain on peace, development and security aspects of Bangladesh and its neighbouring countries.

Mainul said the caretaker government has been struggling to save the country from the political crisis and this requires "a reliable legal framework and political system so that the nation does not

New scheme for employment of destitute women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has taken a new project to provide employment opportunities for destitute women in the rural areas by engaging them for repair and maintenance of village kutchra roads.

Each woman will get Tk 60 per day for such work, sources said.

In a meeting chaired by Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, the Executive Committee of National Economic Council (Ecnec) Thursday approved the project titled 'Rural Employment Opportunities for Public Assets' that will cover 41 upazilas in six districts.

The European Union is funding most of the Tk 174 crore project and local government at the Union Parishad level will select destitute, widows and abandoned women for the jobs under the five-year project, till 2011.

The project will begin in 387 union parishads in Satkhira, Narsingdi, Barguna, Feni, Habiganj and Sirajganj districts.

There is a target to provide job opportunities on daily payment to about 30 destitute women in a union parishad, sources said, adding that in some cases, destitute and unemployed men will also get the opportunity to work in case of job crisis in a certain period.

RMG workers block highway for payment of arrears

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Aggrieved workers of an export-oriented garment factory in Gazipur went on a rampage yesterday blocking the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway for at least an hour over unpaid monthly and overtime wages.

The police said employees of Fortuna Apparels Ltd started protest, as they did not receive their last month's salaries and overtime since March.

The agitating workers blocked the highway at 1.45pm leaving hundreds of vehicles stranded on either side of the road.

Members of the joint forces and Rapid Action Battalion brought the situation under control by striking a deal under which the owner assured the workers that all outstanding bills would be paid by Tuesday.



FROM LEFT ... Hungry hippos open their mouths when they see grass in visitors' hands at Dulahajra Safari Park in Cox's Bazar. The park now has 13 elephants and the park authorities are struggling to feed these animals.



PHOTO: STAR

Starving at safari park

Too many animals crammed at Dulahajra sanctuary leads to severe food crisis

NUR UDDIN ALAMGIR, Ctg

Fund shortage at the country's lone safari park at Dulahazra of Chakoria in Cox's Bazar has been affecting food supply for wild animals as around 250 more animals were added to the park since January this year.

After the present government took over in January, joint forces rescued most of these new residents of the park during their drives at houses and establishments owned by graft suspects. Many individuals also 'donated' some of the animals to the park during this period.

Before the recent influx of rescued or donated animals that

include two elephants, Dulahazra Park was already home to 4,000 animals of 165 species.

During the last fiscal year, allocated fund to feed all these animals was only Tk 40 lakh, said Dr Tapan Kumar Dey, project director of the park.

Over Tk 15,000 is required per month to feed an elephant alone. The cost includes payment to the mahout (caretaker/ trainer of elephants), said sources.

There are 13 elephants in the park at present and the annual fund allocation is insufficient to take care of all the animals in the park. Even though more animals were

sent to the park, no arrangement was made yet to allocate sufficient funds for feeding and maintaining the animals, the sources observed.

The park authorities claimed that around Tk 2 lakh out of the monthly allocation of Tk 3.3 lakh is being spent on the 13 elephants.

Fund shortage has forced the park authorities to receive animal feed on credit from a private animal feed supplier from Chittagong named Ayub and Brothers. The park now owes Tk 3 lakh to the supplier.

"Tk 70 lakh to Tk 80 lakh per year is required for feeding all these animals. Right now we

are taking care of the animals somehow, but it's getting too difficult to continue like this," Project Director Dr Tapan observed.

"We accept new animals as per the directives of courts and to discourage general public from confining wild animals in cages for mere personal entertainment," he added.

The seized and donated animals recently sent to the park include 90 spotted deer (chital), 42 barking deer (maya), a species of muntjac deer, three sambar deer, one freshwater crocodile, one saltwater crocodile, nine black bear, four pythons, 17 peacocks, 19 Turkish pheasants

and two emus.

Dulahazra Safari Park was developed on an undulating landscape of around 2,224 acres of area at Chakoria in Cox's Bazar, some 107 km away from the port city, with an objective to create facilities for eco-tourism, research work and entertainment aside from conserving wild animals in a natural environment.

Since the park was made open to the public, it has been drawing a huge crowd all year round -- 6,000 visitors daily during peak season (November to March) and 2,000 visitors daily during off season (April to October).

Water saving rice varieties invented

HASIBUR RAHMAN BILU, Bogra

Local agriculture scientists have invented 93 new varieties of paddy that could save about 33 to 50 percent water during cultivation.

The scientists of Rural Development Academy (RDA) in Bogra and Bangladesh Rice Research Institute have jointly invented the water saving varieties recently under a yearlong project titled "Development and Dissemination of Water Saving Rice Technology in South Asia."

International Rice Research Institute initiated the project assisted by the Asian Development Bank.

RDA Director General (in-charge) Mohammad Ferdous Alam hoped that apart from water, energy and power uses would also come down once cultivation of the newly innovated varieties starts.

"It would require a year more to initiate cultivation of the new varieties. By this time we will identify which varieties will be more beneficial for cultivation in which localities," he added.

Project Coordinator AKM Zakaria, also RDA deputy director, said currently five tonnes of water is used to produce a kg of paddy. "The country will face water crisis in a few years if water is used at the current rate," Zakaria told The Daily Star.

He said Bangladesh uses five times the water India spends to produce one kg of paddy.

The RDA official said the new varieties were cultivated at



PHOTO: STAR

Agricultural scientists check water usage in a paddy field. They developed 93 new species of paddy that consume less water thus reducing irrigation costs.

Cops yet to find existence of Jadid al Qaeda

Says IGP

UNB, Dhaka

Inspector General of Police (IGP) Noor Mohammad yesterday said police are yet to find any existence of militant outfit 'Jadid al Qaeda Bangladesh' that claimed responsibility for the May 1 bomb explosions at three railway stations.

He said this while talking to the reporters at the final match of National Police Hockey Tournament at Rajarbagh Police Lines field in the afternoon.

The IGP, however, said the investigation into the May 1 bomb

Hannan Shah, son sued again

A CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

Two more cases were filed against BNP leader Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah and his son Rezaul Hannan yesterday in Gazipur.

Fisherman Haripad of Ghorshwar village of the district lodged a case against the two with Kapashia Police Station.

According to him, the accused illegally took lease of a part of Ghorshwar Jalmahal (water body), which was used by the fishermen of nearby five villages for long, and started torturing them during the tenure of the immediate past government.

Owner of Bhawal Paribahan Private Ltd MH Noman filed an extortion case against the two with

G8 leaves US free hand to choose Wolfowitz successor

AFP, Potsdam, Germany

Group of Eight finance ministers yesterday left the United States a free hand in choosing a successor to Paul Wolfowitz as head of the World Bank, apparently to avoid transatlantic friction on the matter.

Ministers from Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia and the United States signalled during a two-day meeting here that they would not challenge a tradition according to which the United States appoints an American citizen as the bank's president.

In return, Europe traditionally names the head of the bank's sister organisation, the International Monetary Fund.

France would not "seek to profit from the unfortunate events" at the World Bank "to alter the balance of power that arose from the Bretton Woods agreement", which gave birth to the two institutions in the

late 1940s, a G8 source told AFP here.

It would not be "appropriate" for France "to get involved in a battle with the US on the matter," the source said.

Nevertheless, longer term changes could not be ruled out "within the framework of a necessary reform of the World Bank," the source continued.

Earlier during the talks on the shores of Lake Schwielowsee near Potsdam, the German and Japanese finance ministers, Peer Steinbrueck and Koji Omi, said they too would not object to Washington's right to choose Wolfowitz's successor.

Steinbrueck, the meeting host, said it was "probably best in this situation to stick to existing procedures."

US Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, who was absent in Potsdam, will oversee the process

Nepal Maoists threaten strike over 'inhuman' camp conditions

AFP, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoists have threatened to begin nationwide protests yesterday unless the government promises to improve 'inhuman' conditions at camps where former rebel fighters are housed, state media said.

As part of a landmark peace deal ending a decade of bloody civil war late last year, the fighters have been confined to UN-monitored camps.

But the camps have no clean water and inmates run the risk of disease, the Maoists say.

Prayer Timing		
May 20		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-05	4-40
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-40	6-45
Esha	8-00	8-30
Source: Islamic Foundation		

70 Taliban men killed in attack

3 German soldiers slain in bombing

AFP, Khost/ Kabul

Nearly 70 Taliban militants were killed in an ambush by US-led forces and Afghan soldiers in eastern Afghanistan while three German soldiers were killed in bomb blast, a military commander said yesterday.

The rebels were killed late Friday in Paktia province near the border with Pakistan, Afghan army general Sami-Ul Haq Badar said.

"We set an ambush, attacked them and killed 67 Taliban. Their bodies were lying on the ground," he said.

The general said the soldiers

had been tipped off that there were Taliban in the area. No Afghan or foreign soldiers were hurt in the gunfight, which lasted several hours, he said.

Paktia is one of the most violent regions in Afghanistan and one where the Taliban are at their most active, launching regular attacks on Afghan and foreign troops.

The attack took place in Jaji district, where Pakistan and Afghan forces traded fire over two days last week, killing 13 Afghans.

A Nato soldier was shot dead -- reportedly by a man in Pakistani military uniform -- just across the border after talks to defuse the

tensions. A Pakistani soldier was also killed.

The Taliban, ousted from power more than five years ago, are still active in the south and east of the country.

The rebels have threatened a wave of violence, including suicide bombings and roadside explosions, following the killing of their top military commander Mullah Dadullah a week ago.

Dadullah was the most senior Taliban member to be killed since the group's toppling in late 2001 by a US-led coalition that invaded Afghanistan following the

Death of youth in Rab action sparks protests

Rab says he was killed during clashes with kidnappers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Plainclothes Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel allegedly beat a youth dead and injured his family members and neighbours triggering protests at Chhoto Bongram Purbopara in Rajshahi city suburbs yesterday.

Police sources said the dead was identified as Quamrul Islam Majnu, 25, and there were no criminal records against him.

Protesting Rab's actions, angry locals brought out processions several times during the day and a large procession in the evening. They chanted slogans against Rab

and the caretaker government.

They demanded actions taken against those responsible. A large number of police were deployed in the area to prevent any untoward incidents.

Majnu's body was not handed over to his family members as of filing of this story, as doctors of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) declined to perform autopsy on his body after police mentioned in the inquest report that he had no torture marks.

Journalists were also not allowed to take photos of Majnu's body as the RMCH authorities

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8 more US soldiers killed in Iraq blast

Gunmen massacre 15 Iraqi villagers

AFP, Baghdad/ Sulaimaniya

Eight more American troops were killed on a single day in Iraq, the US military said yesterday, amid raging violence and a desperate search for three captured soldiers.

Outgoing British leader Tony Blair, whose premiership has been dominated by his unpopular decision to join the 2003 invasion to topple Saddam Hussein, arrived in Iraq yesterday for his seventh and final visit as prime minister.

Blair, who was making an unannounced visit before he steps down from office in June, planned to reassure Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki that his departure

will not bring an end to Britain's support.

Shortly after Blair arrived in the capital's Green Zone, three mortar rounds or rockets exploded in the heavily fortified compound, wounding one person, said US Embassy spokesman Lou Fintor said.

One round struck the British Embassy compound, according to security officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information. It was not known if Blair was in the embassy at the time.

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