

Subsidy, import duty

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Ashraf Hossain, former whip and recently expelled joint secretary-general of BNP, and writer Selina Hossain.

BBC World Service Trust in conjunction with the BBC Bangla Service organised the event that was moderated by Kamal Ahmed of BBC.

All the speakers said the present government would have to take responsibility if it fails to control the rising prices of essentials.

Dr Khan, also a former cabinet secretary, said various initiatives of the present government in tackling the price hike including sealing off of numerous warehouses to prevent illegal hoarding and harassment of business leaders were not appropriate.

He advised the government to increase the supply of commodities in the market and at the same time, enhance its own stockpile.

Describing the sufferings of people of limited and fixed income group, he also suggested that the government should import more essentials and undertake a massive essential goods distribution programme for the poor.

"Above all, the government will have to put emphasis on the food management for overcoming the enduring problem," Khan said.

Former whip Ashraf said this government is already proven to have failed in curbing the spiralling prices despite involving the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) in the sale of commodities.

Maj Gen (retd) Subid Ali said there has to be a problem somewhere down the line for which the government failed to control the price surge.

Selina Hossain said an silent famine exists in the country as a large number of the impoverished

population cannot afford to have adequate food due to the ongoing price spiral of essentials.

Replying to a query, all the discussants suggested that the government should take necessary measures immediately to solve the prevailing problem centring the national flag carrier Biman.

In their opinion, Biman was destroyed in a planned way during the three previous political governments.

Dr Khan and Subid Ali both said that to get through the present crisis, the government should adopt an open-sky policy for foreign airlines for at least six months to one year.

They also advised the government to charter sufficient airplanes and send the stranded Bangladeshi workers abroad.

Dr Khan said the best way to overcome the crisis is to privatise the Biman as soon as possible.

Ashraf said the present government has to resolve the Biman crisis effectively to prove the previous regimes unsuccessful.

Selina demanded investigation into all corruption in Biman. She suggested that the money smuggled out of the country by the corrupt should be brought back and used to purchase new airplanes for the national flag carrier.

Replying to another query, Ashraf said, since the party chairperson is now in jail custody, a new chairperson might be selected through discussions.

He also said a detained person does not have the right to expel anyone and the process of his expulsion by the detained chairperson was undemocratic as it was not in compliance with the party constitution.

DEPZ factories

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police with Ashulia Police Station on Friday night against around 100 unknown workers for attacking police and damaging government properties during the agitation.

The detainees are Ilyas, Monir and Adam Ali.

Police said they talked to Helal over cell phone yesterday evening when Helal told them that he had been kept confined at a place in Sylhet.

Helal also talked to his wife Farida Akhter yesterday evening, police sources said.

A police official wishing anonymity said, "It is now clear that a vested quarter including Helal tried to create workers' unrest in the DEPZ."

"It will be clear who were behind the demonstration, once Helal is caught," he added.

Police are also looking for Sumon, who spread the news of Helal's killing on Thursday over stealing of a cell phone set.

Meanwhile, Featherlite Ltd in a press release yesterday said the workers of the factory turned violent on September 13 and beat factory officials and destroyed documents, raw materials, readymade garments and equipment after Sewing Operator Helal Uddin went missing following a trifling matter of stealing a mobile phone.

It also said the personal information given by Helal is false and fabricated.

It has been known from the workers that Helal is hiding around the DEPZ area, the release added.

It said the incident has no link with the workers' salary, and the authorities are not involved in the incident at all.

The company provides salaries according to the latest Labour Law, 2006 and in line with directives of the BEPZA, the release claimed.

The BEPZA in a separate press release said workers became exited on September 13 following the stealing of a mobile phone set on the production floor of Featherlite Ltd.

At one stage, a few outsiders spread rumours that an official killed Helal and dumped his body.

A group of outsiders forcibly entered the DEPZ in the morning the following day and tried to attack the factories.

City roads

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government offices will open today amid the Ramadan rush.

All the thoroughfares were found choked up with vehicles yesterday and the intolerable suffering reached the peak in the second half of the day as people were rushing for their home to have iftar with their families.

"Knowing well that there is no point in taking a taxi, I walked to my home from Science Laboratory," said Motiur Rahman, an NGO worker of Tejknipura. "It was a total standstill," he said describing the scene of the area at 3:30pm.

Caused mainly by inadequate streets and roadways and an ill-planned communications network, traffic congestion recently got acute due to repair work of roads damaged during floods.

Yesterday, those in emergencies suffered the most, as there was no alternative way to reach their destinations.

"I know it's taking too long, but what can I do? You see, all roads look the same, frozen," Joynul Abedin, a vegetable trader of Khilkhet told this correspondent at Mohakhali intersection at about 3:00pm. He was taking his wife to Dhaka Medical College Hospital for gynaecological complications.

It took newspaper employee Shaheen nearly 45 minutes to reach his office at Karwan Bazar from Shahbagh intersection at 3:30pm.

However, the traffic jam eased before the iftar hours.

United News of Bangladesh (UNB) quoted Deputy Commissioner (DC) for Traffic (West) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police Shoyeb Ahmed as saying that most non-government organizations operated their businesses though yesterday was holiday.

"That's why most of the streets in the city were blocked with vehicles, causing traffic jam," he told UNB.

The DC of the DMP also said that from 2:00pm to 4:00pm the traffic jams turned for the worse as most of the city dwellers came out of their houses with cars for shopping on the occasion of Ramadan.

On managing traffic from today, Sayedur Rahman, DC of South Traffic Zone of DMP, told The Daily Star, "We're going to double our manpower during office breaks."

They have also sought assistance from the Dhaka City Corporation.

AL forms

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Talking to reporters, Sajeda said Zillur Rahman directed her to probe the incident. "I think I could start working within a couple of days," said the AL leader who is a relative of detained AL President Sheikh Hasina.

AL Acting General Secretary Mukul Bose, Organising Secretary Abdul Mannan, AL leaders AKM Jahangir Hossain, and Prof Abu Sayeed were abused by some adherents of the party before and after Wednesday's Central Working Committee meeting.

Following the manhandling of the leaders by agitating party activists, almost all the leaders expressed their concerns about keeping the party united.

Bhuiyan gets boost

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under our leadership and we will sweep to power," he said adding that they would lead not only the BNP but also the nationalist force in the country.

Leaders of the pro-reform faction claimed that over 100 NEC members and former lawmakers attended the "informal meet".

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain has termed the meeting illegal. "Mannan Bhuiyan does not belong to the party anymore and so he cannot convene any meeting using the name of the BNP," he said addressing a press briefing at his NAM apartment.

Such gathering involving the NEC members and former lawmakers without the chairperson's consent is a violation of the BNP constitution, he added.

He renewed his call for the government to allow them to enter the headquarters at Naya Paltan and withdraw the state of emergency.

Dismissing Brig Gen (retd) Hannan Shah's claim that he is the chief coordinator of the BNP, Delwar said the party constitution does not provide for any such post.

BHUIYAN SPEECH
Speaking to the NEC members and former lawmakers, Bhuiyan said the party is going through a difficult patch as it has long deviated from late president Ziaur Rahman's ideals.

Stressing the need for reforms in politics as well as in different organs of the state, he said the state would fail if necessary reforms are not carried out.

"They have expelled me, Ashraf and Tripti only because we sought an elected and collective leadership, and transparency at all levels," he observed.

Denouncing the expulsion orders as undemocratic, he maintained that the rank and file do not accept those.

He said they do not want division; rather they are in favour of patience and understanding among the ranks. He claimed that most of the NEC members want the party to be moulded into a democratic organisation through reforms.

"We represent not only the BNP but also the nationalist force and we will ensure the right of the people on return to power through winning the next election," he said. "We also don't believe in counter-expulsion when most of the partymen are siding with us," noted Bhuiyan, also a former LGRD and cooperative minister.

Participants chanted slogans at intervals throughout the speech of Bhuiyan.

Fazlul Azim, a former lawmaker, in his speech demanded expulsion

of those who are responsible for the current situation the party is in.

Ali Newaz Khaiyam said everybody is criticising Khaleeda Zia for her autarchic decision to expel the secretary general.

"The way she has been running the organisation over the years has in fact led the BNP to its worst political debacle," former lawmaker SA Sultan Titu said. He asked Bhuiyan for initiative to hold council and take action against the corrupt ones.

Rustom Ali Farazi said most of the ministers in the previous government had abused the power.

Former state minister Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury said they would seek to materialise the ideals of Ziaur Rahman with Mannan Bhuiyan at the helm.

Among others, Major (retd) Hafizuddin Ahmed, Mofazzal Karim, MA Hakim, ZA Khan, City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka, Ashraf Hossain, Shah Mohammad Abu Zafar, Sultan Mahmud Babu, Brig (retd) Anwar Hossain, Shahiduzzaman Beltu, Abu Abbas, Col (retd) Anwarul Azim, Engineer Shamsuddin Ahmed, Asadul Habib Dulu, Nitai Chandra Roy, Dhirendranath Saha, Shafi Ahmed Chowdhury, GM Siraj, Kazi Rafique Islam, Dewan Salahuddin Babu, Zahiruddin Swapan and Mofiqul Hasan Tripti were present.

Bombing

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Also Friday, the military reported that they killed 10 guerrillas who tried to attack a defence line in Muhamalai, in Jaffna district.

Rebel spokesman Rasiyah Ilanthuray said not immediately be reached for comment.

Fighting has escalated in Sri Lanka's Northern Province in recent weeks, with the military capturing a key coastal territory that served as a rebel supply point.

In July the government celebrated taking full control of the Eastern Province from Tamil Tigers after 13 years.

The Tigers, who want to carve out an independent state for ethnic minority Tamils in the island's north and east, are still holding a vast area in the north where they run a de facto state.

Sri Lanka's civil war flared up in 1983, and witnessed a brief lull after a Norwegian-brokered cease-fire in 2002. A new wave of fighting, however, including assassinations and airstrikes over the past 22 months, has killed more than 5,000 people.

The two sides continue to violate the cease-fire, which exists only on paper, but neither is willing to officially withdraw from the agreement, fearing international isolation.

Saarc officials

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on the social window in order to use the money for schemes, programmes and projects "in our region that are aimed at the disadvantaged and vulnerable" sections of society.

Addressing the meeting, the Indian finance minister said a Saarc network of researchers has been set up to identify and analyse and help the countries of the region face the current global financial and economic developments affecting the region.

He drew attention of the meeting to the situation where securities markets, particularly those in the emerging economies, are susceptible to the effects of cross-border financial flows and activities.

On collaboration between capital market regulators in Saarc countries, Chidambaram said there was recognition now that capital markets in each member-country would require some kind of coordination and integration.

The ministerial meeting recommended establishment of a group of experts on development of capital markets in the Saarc region, he added.

Asked about a common capital market for Saarc or cross-border listings, Chidambaram said these were "for the distant future" and what the Saarc countries are looking at right now is whether capital market regulators can work together, share information and cooperate with each other through memorandum of understanding (MoU).

Addressing the ministerial meeting, he suggested enhanced collaboration among Saarc capital market regulators through MoUs and other bilateral agreements that allow flexibility in networking, coordination, cooperation and exchange of information as well as establishment of associations and bodies with specific purpose of removing barriers to capital market integration in the region.

Chidambaram also proposed harmonisation of laws, accounting and governance standards and development of a regulatory framework with regard to enforcement, compliance, investor protection and information-sharing.

Concerted efforts would be

Tsunami

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coast, the velocity of the tsunami's water column would slow down by hitting the slope as far as 100 kilometres from the shore", said Maksud Kamal.

"When it reaches the coast, the waves' velocity would be so weak that it would hardly do any harm across our coastal belt", he added.

Dr Aftab, also vice president of Bangladesh Earthquake Society, said conditions for a tsunami are an undersea earthquake measuring over 7.0 on the Richter scale, focal depth (epicentre) 10-15 kilometres in depth, vertical waves and a minimum two-kilometre deep water.

The speakers blasted the authorities for raising belated tsunami warning on September 12 and said it panicked thousands of people and incurred the nation financial losses.

"Tsunami warning on September 12 was wrong. As the earthquake hit Indonesia at 5:30pm, tsunami waves should have reached Bangladesh coastal areas by three hours. But the warning said tsunami might hit at midnight, which was impossible", said Mohammad Inamul Haque, former director general of Bangladesh Haor & Wetland Development Board (BHWDB).

"Warning on September 12 should have been withdrawn after 9:00pm. But the government did not do so even though the Indonesian government lifted the warning (by that time)," he said.

Khurshid Alam, a specialist in disaster management, said the government should immediately explain why tsunami warning on September 12 came late.

The experts urged the caretaker government to set up modern earthquake observation centres at different places in the country so proper information and warning about natural disasters like tsunami, floods, earthquakes and cyclones can be provided on time.

Abu Naser Khan, co-ordinator of Paribesh Bachao Andolon, said study on tsunami should be incorporated into university curriculum, especially in disaster management department.

EC to sit

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The dialogue schedules for other parties are: Ganotantrik Dal Sept 20, Jatiya Party (Ershad) Sept 27, Jatiya Party (Manju) Oct 4, JSD (Inu) Oct 9, JSD (Rab) Oct 22, Jamaat-e-Islami Oct 25, NAP (Mozaffar) Oct 28, Workers Party (Nov 11), Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Nazir) Nov 15, CPB Nov 25 and Samyabadi Dal Nov 29.

Ex-MP Gias

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Siddhirganj Police Station yesterday.

According to the case, the former MP had been realising Tk 60 for per maund lime from the lime traders of the area since 2002.

Amir Hossain and three other lime traders paid a total Tk 64.40 lakh to the lawmaker in various instalments.

A total of 12 cases have so far been filed against Gaisuddin, police said.

SUST student

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true, the IO told The Daily Star.

SI Shahed Uddin of the same police station filed the case on September 3 accusing Mustafizur Rahman Raju and 30 others, as they took out a procession on the campus following violence in Dhaka University and other areas on 22 August.

Raju is the organising secretary of Sust unit of Bangladesh Chhatra League and a final year student of political studies.

Criminal killed

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accomplishes fired on them prompting them to retaliate.

Habil received bullets as he tried to escape during the shootout.

He was rushed to Daulatpur Upazila Health Complex where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Police recovered a country-made rifle and six rounds of bullet from the spot.

Police said Habil was accused in ten cases on different charges.

Fresh floods

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upazila of Gaibandha.

According to our correspondents' report, with relief distribution already running thin and the spread of water-borne diseases, significant shortages of saline and other medicines have emerged in many districts.

Five lakh people were reportedly marooned in Manikganj, and another 1.5 lakh people were marooned in Kishoreganj.

Road link between district centres and upazilas continued to be snapped in Manikganj, Kishoreganj, Gaibandha, Netrakona and Sirajganj.

Our correspondent in Sirajganj reports: Railway link between Sirajganj and Rajshahi snapped Friday after the floods washed parts of the tracks away.

Cheated in Malaysia

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Jainal Abedin, one of the workers, told Malaysiakini, a web-based news service, that they were left with no choice but to go on a hunger strike in order to get help from the Bangladesh mission.

"We are waiting for death. Four days [without] food. Many [are] sick," said Jainal, 25, on Friday.

He said they lost the hope of finding proper employment in Malaysia and want their high commission to arrange for their passage home.

Jainal also said the workers had been brought to Malaysia in four batches between February and May this year, with promises of high-paying jobs, but they ended up doing manual labour in an acid factory.

They were allegedly not paid for six months and fed only one meal a day. The workers are holding their Bangladeshi employment agent responsible for duping them.

"We want our money back from [the agent]. We had to sell our goats, cows and even lands to come here," added Jainal.

Typically, Bangladeshis have to spend about RM12,000 which is equivalent to Tk 2.3 lakh in order to obtain work in Malaysia.

Human rights lawyer Renuka T Balasubramaniam who represents the aggrieved workers said a claim for the back wages was filed with the labour department last week against the workers' former employers based in Sentul of Kuala Lumpur.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh High Commissioner Khairuzzaman told BBC Bangla Service that they held a meeting with the recruiting agents, workers, and local human rights activists on Friday, where the mission assured the workers

Bangladesh

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more attacking mood, batting on 32 off 12 balls and Bangladesh raced to 54-3 in four overs.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh play their first Super Eights match against Australia today, less than 24 hours after their game against South Africa.

The match will begin at 6pm Bangladesh Time with ESPN providing live coverage.

The day's hectic schedule also includes a cracker of a contest between India and New Zealand in Johannesburg while South Africa face England later on tonight.

It will be the first time that the Tigers play against the mighty Australians in this form of cricket and with Ricky Ponting's men being shocked by Zimbabwe earlier in the piece, they are well aware of their opponents.

Bangladesh ousted the West Indies from the competition with a magnificent 5-wicket win at the Wanderers in Johannesburg on Thursday. Ashrafu and Aftab blitzed half-centuries to sink the men from the Caribbeans.

Ponting said Australia could not afford to turn in another below-par display if they are going to be crowned World Twenty20 champions.

Australia were shocked by the African minnows on Wednesday, before recovering to thrash England by eight wickets on Friday.

Ahead of Sunday's Super Eights game, Ponting said: "If we're not at our absolute best in this format, everyone is a bit vulnerable."

"We showed a lot of character to bounce back in the manner that we did."

Australia knocked off 135 to beat England with more than five overs to spare and Ponting believes his side can keep on improving.

Pak presidential polls

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prime minister, and in this situation who will vote for us?" Chaudhry said.

Musharraf seized power in a 1999 coup, overthrowing the government of then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. But the US-allied military leader has seen his popularity slide this year after he tried to remove the Supreme Court's popular chief judge and Islamic militants stepped up attacks in the nation.

On Friday, Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party announced the two-time former prime minister, who left the country in 1999 amid corruption allegations, will return home in October to campaign in the parliamentary elections, regardless of the outcome of her talks with Musharraf.

"This will strengthen our efforts for democracy," Benazir, who lives in exile in Dubai and London, told Pakistan's Geo television. "Democracy should be restored completely and the army removed from the scene."

Both Benazir and Musharraf are urging moderates to work together to defeat Taliban and al-Qaeda extremists based along the frontier with Afghanistan. But they have failed to produce an accord amid signs Musharraf is reluctant to give up his sweeping powers.

The ruling coalition says it has enough support to get the simple

that they will be given job options.

If the workers do not like to continue working in Malaysia, they will be sent back home, he said.

"We also kept undertakings from the recruiting agents who had brought the workers here, and told them that they will be caught if they could not arrange alternative jobs for the workers soon," Khairuzzaman said.

Meanwhile, AFP reported yesterday that thousands of foreign workers, mostly Bangladeshis, were forced to camp in the car park of Kuala Lumpur's international airport while waiting for their employers.

The immigration department turned a section of the car park into a temporary shelter for foreigners while more permanent facilities are being built there, said the report.

An immigration counter was set up to process visas and other paper works for employers and agents, the report added.

A Bangladeshi worker, Khokon, told the news agency that he had arrived two days ago with 24 other men who had been told they would be working in Malaysian factories.

"We have to use our own money to buy food while waiting for our agent to pick us up," he said.

An agent who came to the airport to collect 50 workers said delays are often caused by miscommunications between the agents in Malaysia and Bangladesh.

"Some agents had no idea that their workers had arrived, so they were not here to pick up the workers. Had the agents failed to show up within seven days of arrival of the workers, the workers would be deported," he told AFP.

Baghdad car bomb strikes bakery; 11 dead

AP, Baghdad

A car bomb struck a bakery crowded with customers lining up for bread, killing at least 11 people yesterday as they ended their daytime Ramadan fast, officials said.

An al-Qaeda front group, meanwhile, warned it will hunt down and kill Sunni Arab tribal leaders who cooperate with the US and its Iraqi partners, saying the assassination of the leader of the revolt against the terror movement was just a beginning.

Hospital officials said the 11 killed in the Baghdad explosion included two children. The blast damaged five stores and three houses and burned five cars, according to police.

"We rushed outside the house after hearing the sound of the explosion. I could see the bakery and a nearby snack shop on fire," said Abu Ahmed, a 36-year-old Shiite government employee. "The wounded were screaming for help as the ambulances were arriving."

The bombing, which occurred at the start of iftar, the meal Muslims eat to break their dawn-to-dusk fast during the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, was a blow to Iraqi government hopes that it would be a peaceful month to show the success of a 7-month-old security operation in the capital and surrounding areas.

Al-Qaida statements were posted Friday and Saturday on Islamist Web sites and among other things claimed responsibility for the assassination of Abdul-Sattar Abu Risha, who spearheaded the uprising against al-Qaida in Anbar province west of the capital.

In claiming responsibility for Abu Risha's death Thursday, the Islamic State said it had formed "special security committees" to track down and "assassinate the tribal figures, the traitors, who stained the reputations of the real tribes by submitting to the soldiers of the Crusade" and the Shiite-led government of Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki.

majority needed to re-elect Musharraf, who also holds the post of army chief. Yet the support of Benazir's party would help achieve the two-thirds majority needed for constitutional amendments that could head off of legal challenges to his re-election bid.

One ruling party official, seeking anonymity because of the sensitivity of the subject, told The Associated Press that the Benazir-Musharraf talks had divided ruling party members amid concerns that their electoral chances could suffer if Musharraf makes too many concessions to Benazir.

Despite the uncertainty over the talks, the government says that on her return, Benazir will not suffer the fate of political rival Sharif, who was swiftly expelled when he came back from exile Monday. But officials said she would have to face pending corruption charges.

Benazir Bhutto, now 56, was only 35 when she became prime minister in 1988, the first female leader of a modern Muslim nation. She was elected to a second term in 1993.

Analysts say even if Benazir gains enough seats to form the government, she will be a weaker prime minister because the president enjoys more power. Bhutto's demands included clipping the wings of the president by reducing his power to dismiss the parliament, Chaudhry said.