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Mirpur sizzles on death rumour

RMG workers clash with cops, block road for hours; over 350 factories remain closed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several thousand garment workers in the capital's Mirpur area clashed with police intermittently throughout the day yesterday, leaving at least 30 people injured and traffic obstructed for hours.

Demonstrations for pay rise, medical facilities and immediate payment of arrears paralysed life and trade in the city's garment industry hub for the second consecutive day.

Over 350 factories across Mirpur-10, Mirpur-13, Mirpur-14, Pallabi, Shearpara, Kazi Para and adjacent areas remained closed fearing attacks by the workers.

The same day, at least 20 more people were wounded in a fight between workers and police at Dhaka Export Processing Zone (DEPZ) in Savar. Hundreds of workers protesting sudden closure of a garment factory there barricaded Kaliakoir-Nabinagar road for over an hour in the morning.

Police filed six cases with Kafur Police Station in connection with the workers' unrest in the capital. Of the cases, four were for violation of the emergency power rules and one for assault on the law enforcers.

In Mirpur, police charged baton and fired tear gas canisters to disperse the marauding crowds. The demonstrators responded by throwing projectiles, burning tyres and blockading the main thoroughfares.

Yesterday's violence was the continuation of Monday's fighting following rumours that two workers of the MBM Garments had been killed by the staff of Opex Style Wears Ltd.

The overnight arrest of a worker named Shakhawat by the Rapid Action Battalion-4 intensified the



A number of people taking advantage of the chaos around garment factories loot a warehouse of Opex Stylewares Ltd at Mirpur-14 in the capital yesterday.

agitation.

According to eyewitnesses, workers in their hundreds massed outside MBM Garments at Mirpur-13 at around 8:00am and began agitating for immediate release of Shakhawat who had been one of the organisers of the campaign for eight-point demand.

They set up barricades with electric poles in front of the BRTA office at around 10:00am, disrupting vehicular movement on Mirpur-Kachukhet Road.

Workers from around 100 other factories soon joined their protesting fellows. Split into several groups, they spread to Rokeya Sarani, Mirpur-10, Kachukhet and other adjoining areas.

At around 11, police closed off the road between Mirpur-10 and Kachukhet while the workers were blockading Rokeya Sarani leading to Mirpur-10 roundabout. Chase and counter-chase for hours left some 30 workers injured.

Local said some of the groups

were more interested in looting. Taking advantage of the melee, they stole from a number of factories in Mirpur-13 and -14.

As things threatened to spiral out of control, two battalions of Bangladesh Rifles were called in at around 2:00pm.

Besides, high officials of police came to the scene and assured the angry workers that Shakhawat would be released. On the assurance, a five-member team of

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Offenders warned

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government will take punitive actions against those involved in the recent labour unrest in the garment factories in city's Mirpur area.

The decision was taken yesterday at an inter-ministerial meeting chaired by Labour and Employment Adviser Anwarul Iqbal at the

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BNP to skip polls without Khaleda

Delwar tells News World

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The pro-Khaleda faction of BNP will not participate in dialogue with the government or in the upcoming election without the consent of detained party chairperson Khaleda Zia.

"BNP will not attend any type of dialogue with the government without the approval of the chairperson," said Khandaker Delwar Hossain, the Khaleda-appointed secretary general of the party, during a teleconference with News World, a New York based news agency.

The teleconference was organised on Monday by Khaleda Zia Anorjati Mukti Andolan (international movement to free Khaleda Zia) and moderated by Abul Hashem Bulbul, according to News World.

Delwar's comment came at a time when chief adviser

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Hopes for talks buzz in political circle

Adviser Shawkat phones Motia

UNB, Dhaka

Newly appointed Food and Health Adviser MM Shawkat Ali yesterday made a phone call to Awami League (AL) Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury to know about AL's stance on the proposed talks between the government and the political parties.

"He wanted to know from me about our stance and thinking about political dialogue," Motia told the news agency in the evening.

She told the adviser that she would let him know after consulting it with acting AL President Zillur Rahman as well as the party forum.

When contacted, leaders of both factions of BNP (Delwar and Haifz) and Jamaat-e-Islami said they were not yet communicated from the government until 8:00pm.

Jamaat Ameer Motiur Rahman Nazami said they are not against

dialogue but his party would take decision after receiving invitation letters and knowing the agenda of such dialogue.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed in his nationwide address on January 12 disclosed his government's intention to take necessary steps soon to hold dialogue with parties.

On January 11, the Council of Advisers took a decision on the proposed talks, apparently meant for breaking the standoff between the caretaker government and politicians.

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftekar Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday told journalists that government-political party dialogue would open a new chapter in the country's present political situation.

Awami League and other parties have been demanding that the government sit with them to resolve political issues that cannot

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SIDR ASSISTANCE

WFP's urgent appeal for \$22m more

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) yesterday made an urgent appeal to international donors for an additional US\$22 million to continue WFP's emergency assistance to more than 2 million victims of Cyclone Sidr.

Despite immediate international and countrywide efforts to provide food, shelter and medical assistance following the November 15 storm, WFP estimates a requirement for 31,000 metric tons of food, at a cost of up to US\$22 million, to meet the immediate food needs of vulnerable survivors in cyclone-affected areas.

"With the generous support of various donors WFP delivered 20,000 tons of emergency food straight to the hungry, homeless and vulnerable people during the relief operations," WFP Bangladesh Country Director Douglas Broderick said in a statement released yesterday.

"But more food is needed for the poorest of the survivors who are trying to rebuild their homes and replant their fields for the next harvest," the statement added.

WFP through a US\$52 million emergency operation, has provided immediate relief assistance to over 2.2 million cyclone-affected people in the southern coastal regions, helping them to restore livelihoods and rural community infrastructures.

"We need urgent funding now to continue the emergency food assistance that the survivors of Cyclone Sidr are depending on," said Broderick.

If further funding is received, WFP will provide food-for-work rations or cash-for-work for individuals rebuilding homes and communities and to help in restoring livelihoods for families, the statement added.

WFP food assistance is helping meet immediate food needs of

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\$2.1B AID PLEA

Donors start assessing Sidr loss

REJAUUL KARIM BYRON

A team of representatives from various donor agencies on Sunday started assessing the government's request of \$2.1 billion in assistance for the restoration and rehabilitation work in the areas affected by Cyclone Sidr.

The 70-member team named Damage and Need Assessment (DNA) mission consists of representatives from Asian Development Bank (ADB), different UN agencies, major bilateral donor countries and 17 members from the World Bank (WB).

The mission will work with different ministries and visit the Sidr affected areas for their assessment work.

Planning ministry sources said the mission would hold a review meeting on January 30 after assessing the damage and make decision on Bangladesh's request.

"How much money they [donors] would provide us as

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Matin given reins of home ministry

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In an unprecedented shuffle in the council of advisers, Shipping Adviser Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin yesterday was given the charge of the home ministry, which traditionally had been kept in the hands of chief adviser during the rule of past caretaker governments.

Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed kept the home ministry under his own jurisdiction since his induction as the head of the current caretaker regime on January 12, 2007, a day after the declaration of the ongoing state of emergency. President Iajuddin Ahmed, who had assumed the office of the chief adviser before Fakhruddin on October 29, 2006, also kept the ministry in his hands.

Previous chiefs of caretaker governments since the system had been constitutionally introduced in 1996, also kept the crucial ministry under their jurisdictions as the ministry plays a pivotal role of maintaining law and order to ensure free and fair elections.

Even the first ever caretaker government formed after the mass upsurge in 1990, overthrowing the autocratic regime of now retired Lt Gen HM Ershad, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, the erstwhile chief of the interim government, had the charge of the home ministry, a former adviser to a caretaker government said.

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Maj Gen (ret'd) MA Matin

No undue favour taken from Hasina Summit chief rejects ACC charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Summit Group Chairman Muhammed Aziz Khan yesterday said he did not take any undue favour from former premier Sheikh Hasina against his Tk 3 crore donation to the Bangabandhu Memorial Trust to establish Bangabandhu Museum.

Talking to a spokesman of Summit Group over telephone from abroad, Aziz denied the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) allegation that the amount was given illegally to get a deal for setting up a barge-mount 100MW power plant in Khulna depriving the lowest bidder.

He said Wartsila Power Development Ltd Consortium, presently known as Khulna Power Co Ltd, was the lowest bidder as per the terms of the tender and that international auditors and financiers have confirmed it.

A declaration suit has been filed

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Edible oil exporters' tricky way to make money

JASIM UDDIN KHAN

When the country was facing an acute dearth of edible oil supply last year, two business groups exported over 20,000 tonnes of edible oil to India at rates below those of local and international markets to get tax benefits on importing from traders there.

Three separate investigations have found that these traders—United Edible Oils Ltd and Bay Fishing Co Ltd—were involved in under-invoicing in order to help their Indian partners get tax benefit.

A member of an investigation team at the Export Promotion Bureau said they have found that these traders also receive similar tax facility from Indian traders while importing.

"The business houses might also have involvement in money laundering under the guise of

exporting to India," the official said preferring anonymity.

The traders have, however, claimed that they exported oil to India to keep alive the business relationship with the neighbouring country and maintain the rules of agreement with the buyers there.

But, the intelligence agencies smelled a rat in the export process and three intelligence agencies conducted separate investigations.

The Central Intelligence Cell, an intelligence wing of the National Board of Revenue, discovered that the two traders exported around 1,290 tonnes of soya bean oil and 1,700 tonnes of palm oil through the Akhaura customs station alone.

The exporters sold soya bean oil at an average price of Tk 39.20 per kilogram during January-August last year. They raised the rate to Tk

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DETAINED TEACHERS, STUDENTS DU demos demand unconditional release

DU CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka University (DU) teachers, students and family members of the detained teachers and a student of the university yesterday continued their demonstration demanding their "unconditional release with dignity".

They demanded their release before January 18, when the deadline set by the Students Against Repression, a students' platform, would end.

However, there was no noticeable sign of any government move to release the DU detainees till yesterday, even though Education Adviser Hossain Zillur Rahman on Sunday night said the detainees would be freed "within the next few days, whatever the court verdict is".

DU Vice-chancellor Prof SMA Faiz yesterday said the teachers and the student are now very close to being released.

Yesterday like previous days, the students of DU under the banner of Students Against Repression dem-

onstrated on campus with a two-hour class abstention, a solidarity rally, collecting signatures from students, a silent procession, staging a play and painting graffiti on campus streets.

At the rally, students, a number of teachers, family members of detained teachers and the student expressed their deep concern over the issue.

Arrestee Manobendra Dev's mother expressed hope that government would withdraw all cases and unconditionally release all detained teachers and students.

Kabery Gayen, a teacher, expressed her deep concern over the present situation on campus saying, "The overall situation might go out of control if the detainees were not released."

Prof MM Akash, Prof M Akhtaruzzaman, Prof Kajol Bandopadhyay, Prof KM Saad Uddin, Prof Helal Uddin Arefin, Prof KM Monwar Uddin, Prof Anwar Hossain, Prof Mezbah Kamal, Prof Mashur Rahman,

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We Remember



(24/06/1975 - 16/01/2007)

We solemnly remember our esteemed Director, Anindya Majumder, who passed away on this day a year ago. We miss him in every step of our lives, and pray for his soul to find eternal peace in heaven.

- Bereaved family members, Directors and employees of New Generation Construction Co. Ltd.

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Dhaka, January 2008

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