

CA meets advisers

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Asked about the cases filed against students of Dhaka College and Bangla College at Mirpur for the August violence, Faiz said the meeting did not discuss this, but he would request the education adviser to speak on it when he speaks before the media.

On apprehensions that only the teachers, not students, will be released, he said there is no reason for such fears.
STUDENTS PROTEST
Students of the DU under the banner of Students Against Repression yesterday held a cultural programme in front of the central library on the campus demanding immediate release of the detainees by withdrawing all the cases against them.

Besides, students of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) formed a human chain on the campus expressing solidarity with the DU students' agitation.

Another platform of students named 'Chhatra-Bandhu' yesterday held a press conference at DU Modhu's Canteen demanding release of the detainees immediately.

They also announced some programmes including laying a siege to the VC's office, and expressed support for the teachers' scheduled hunger strike tomorrow.

Earlier, the DU students on Friday called for a one-hour class boycott at all educational institutions in the country on January 23, and urged the students and teachers to wear black ribbons tomorrow and form human chains at their respective institutions on January 22.

They set a fresh deadline of January 23 for release of the detained DU teachers and a student as their five-day ultimatum ended yesterday. They will also continue boycotting classes for two hours every day until their demands are met.
The DU Teachers' Association also announced programmes, including a three-hour hunger strike at Aparajeyo Bangla from 10:00am to 1:00pm tomorrow and, not holding any admission tests at the university until the detainees are released.

Our RU correspondent adds: Students of the university continued their demonstrations on the campus demanding release of 10 convicted students and an employee of the university in the DGTI vehicle torching case.

Earlier, the students staged demonstrations to press their demands

that also include release of four Dhaka University teachers and a student.
The students staged a protest sit-in and cultural programme at the Shaheed Minar on the campus wearing black ribbons yesterday.

They threatened to launch a tougher movement including students strike at the RU if their demands are not met.

Rice prices

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their nationwide market monitoring yesterday.

Owners of wholesale and retail shops hung prices of rice at their shops as they knew joint forces would be monitoring the market. The joint forces asked all rice traders to keep documents of their transactions.

Sources said joint forces yesterday visited all large wholesale and retail markets in the capital and recorded statements of wholesalers about their rice in stock.

Traders at Babubazar and Badamtali said there is very little possibility of further decline in rice prices as the current wholesale prices are close to the prices at Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and Open Market Sale (OMS) outlets.

They said sellers who kept rice in stock sold their rice at a lower price than the market price, fearing the joint forces monitoring, and the sellers would build their stock again in a week, which would send the price high again.

"We are monitoring to stop irregularities in the market," said a BDR official at the BDR headquarters yesterday.

"We are observing the markets so that none can make extraordinary profits and to prevent traders from making long term stock," added the BDR official wishing anonymity.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) sources said the joint forces launched the monitoring of markets to prevent prices of essential commodities like rice, flour and edible oil from skyrocketing.

Visiting different wholesale markets in the capital, The Daily Star saw large quantity of rice entering the markets of the capital in trawlers, boats, launches and trucks.

Rice prices started rising since the last week of December and have been fluctuating since the first week of January. The highest of the coarse rice prices ever got to was Tk 35 a kg.

Gen Moen

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Asked if the army would continue providing such support in future, he said, "Yes, we can do that. You saw how we stood by the people in the past one year - during two floods and a cyclone."

Commenting on whether the imposition of state of emergency on January 11 last year could have been avoided, he said the situation at that time was critical. Had the political violence continued for a few more days, Bangladesh would have become a failed state.

He said he does not see any problem in holding the national election before December 2008.

"This government's goal is to hold a free, fair and credible election and hand over power to a political government. The Election Commission too has set a roadmap accordingly. And I don't see anything wrong there," he said.

Already 2.6 crore people have been registered as voters and 3 crore forms filled up and distributed, he said, adding, "Inshallah, if all of us work together, we shall be able to hold the election by 2008."

He said the political parties have to reform themselves for a credible election. He said he hopes they have realised that it would be difficult to run the country in the old system.

General Moen said he has no plan to become the country's president.

"I do not want to be the president or chief executive. I only want the army to help the country develop and work for the people."

He said he thinks in a democracy like Bangladesh, there should be a balance of power. "We should consider the ground reality. We've seen different systems - parliamentary, military and presidential. Taking lessons from these, we should have something to maintain the balance of power."

In a parliamentary system, power lies absolutely in the hands of prime minister, he said adding that experts can study and find out what is best for Bangladesh.

Asked if there is a lack of coordination between the army and the Chief Adviser's Office and even within the government, General Moen said the army does not get involved in any decision that the government makes.

"However, we give our opinions if the government wants suggestions on disaster management or law and order," he observed.

Asked what should be the army's role, he said like police and BDR, the army is part of the government. They will work on government instructions.

He thinks the war criminals must be tried and the present government can at least start the process, if it wants.

The army chief said there can be a national security council to help the government. "There are some discussions going on with the government about the issue, but that's not a high priority now."

He said the greatest challenge confronting the government is to control the price hike of essentials.

He said identifying corruption as the number one problem and working to contain the menace are a success of the present administration.

"It is not possible to eradicate corruption completely, but people at least learned that this is the number one enemy," he said.

Of the money siphoned off of the country, Tk 1,010 crore has been already recovered and efforts are underway to retrieve Tk 500 crore more, he said.

Ahmadiyya family

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the ostracised would be fined Tk 500.

Local administration and Islamic University police apparently resolved the matter through arbitration, but soon after the bigots pressed Moazzem to convert to mainstream Islam, threatening that they would otherwise be killed at dead of night following which the family left the village.

Police said they would take prompt action if they find any anomalies.

Missions asked

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community abroad", Iftekhar added.

He said expatriate Bangladeshis have sent remittances that touch nearly \$7 billion last year, which is a record for all times. "Most certainly, they need better looking after."

"Today, we have 'second generation non-resident Bangladeshis who are keen to retain their connections at home by investing," the adviser said.

He said Chinese and Indian expatriate investors have played a key role in development of their respective economies. The foreign ministry will work very closely with the Board of Investment to facilitate this phenomenon.

The adviser also indicated that the government is contemplating setting up of special economic zones to attract expatriate Bangladeshi investment.

Advisers

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asked not to make frequent comments on the issue to avert confusion and misunderstanding, said a source.

The government wants to proceed according to a plan so that the dialogue is fruitful, it added.

Another source said there is little possibility for the talks to start soon since the government wants the Election Commission (EC) to complete first its dialogue with the political parties on electoral reforms.

But the EC, faced with legal complexities over meeting BNP, is uncertain about the fate of the talks that began on September 12 last year and were supposed to be over by November.

Already one and a half months behind schedule, it is still searching for ways to resume the dialogue that it cancelled following a High Court stay order on November 18 last year.

The HC ruling came in response to a writ petition filed by detained BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia challenging the legality of the EC's invitation to the Saifur-led faction of her party.

On November 5, the commission sent the invitation to the pro-reform group, dismissing pro-Khaleda faction's claim that they represent the mainstream BNP and so Khandaker Delwar Hossain, the secretary general appointed by the chairperson, deserves to be in the dialogue.

Dr Akbar Ali Khan

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are being implemented very slowly despite the forecast in the budget that the country may need 2.3 million tonnes of food grain.

The budget also warned that the government would have to feed 50 lakh people in the current fiscal year.

These forecasts had been made before the floods and the cyclone hit the country, but government steps do not correspond to them, he said.

Recalling his experience with political governments as a bureaucrat for 16 years, the former finance secretary said, "I can tell you there was never any such rise in food prices during the rules of political governments."

"The political leaders may be corrupt, they may be inefficient and bad, but they were very careful at least about this issue," he said.

On political reforms, he said negotiation is the only way to reach a consensus with the political parties on this. "Obviously political reform is needed but there is no permanent solution to fully reforming the political situation," Akbar said, adding that no country has a perfect political system.

Political reforms should be done with the consensus from every part of the society. "If you do not have a consensus, you have to pay high in future," he said.

Dr Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmed, president of Bangladesh Economic Association, Yussuf Abdullah Harun, former president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, and Anwar-Ul-Alam Chowdhury, president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, presented the keynote papers at the discussion on economic problems and how to overcome them.

Former caretaker government adviser Sultana Kamal said, "Punishment to bad people and reward for good people should be ensured otherwise no reform can help change the country."

Dr Kamal Hossain said, "We want democracy. But it should not come through just holding an election. We must have appropriate representatives who must be self-sufficient and responsible to the country."

Micro endeavours

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"At the beginning I was producing ice-cream sticks from bamboos. I was looking to make it cost-effective, and for a much easier than traditional way of manufacture it, but could not do that for lack of capital," he said recalling his early struggling days in the business.

He finally imported an ice-cream stick manufacturing unit from India with a microcredit of Tk 70,000 from an NGO in addition to his own capital he had in his hands, and started manufacturing the ice-cream sticks using local petulitrees.

Now, Anwar's business is not only earning money for himself and his family, he also showed the people in his locality how to generate income using a locally available raw material, producing quality products.

Moreover, he is employing a number of local people in his factory, and people who supply raw materials to him are also getting a boost in their earnings.

Best Microentrepreneur Barrison in her emotional brief speech said it was very hard for her to maintain a family of seven with the sole income from her husband's small grocery shop.

"One day, I saw a flower grower transporting large bundles of flowers to a market. Seeing that I decided to start my own flower growing business, and taking a microcredit of Tk 5,000 from an NGO, I started growing flowers," she said adding that her flower growing business changed the lives of her family members since then.

"My future plan is to expand my business," she added.

Expressing her reaction, Best Woman Microentrepreneur Rahima Begum said she comes from a very poor family and her husband was a day labourer who worked very hard to earn a living.

Becoming a member of a microcredit NGO in 1993, she took Tk 3,000 as a loan and started a crab farm that has changed not only her family's fortune but also the financial condition of her community.

Prothom Alo roundtable

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the first time a caretaker government has treated politicians as "untouchables".

He said the government's priorities should be holding elections, trial of the war criminals, correcting contentious history and reducing fear and uncertainty over the political future of Bangladesh.

Former BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan urged all stakeholders to ensure that the country does not return to a situation similar to that before the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11 last year. There is no alternative to elections, he said.

Gono Forum Presidium member Pankaj Bhattacharya said although people want a successful and sustained anti-corruption drive, the government must have public support for its programmes.

Jatiya Party leader Anisul Islam Mahmud urged the government to make the anti-corruption drive more transparent adding that the process needs to be strengthened.

Asif Zardari

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showed complete ignorance about an offer of becoming Prime Minister for the one-year interim period and made it clear to the messengers that he is not interested in any government office for next five years and he will only look after his party. He gained more respect from his close colleagues after throwing away the proposal of becoming Prime Minister for one year.

According to the sources close to Zardari, PPP will be very much interested in forming a government of national reconciliation only after getting majority in the coming elections. PPP will prefer to form a government with PML-N, ANP MQM and other nationalist parties but PPP is not ready to give any commitment for making a coalition with PML-Q in centre and Punjab. Zardari is under intense pressure from within the party not to speak with any important leader of PML-Q before elections. Asif Ali Zardari is determined to get fair and free elections and not through any back channel deal. He is planning for a mass agitation in case of delay in election on February 18th. Asif Ali Zardari is hopeful that following the instructions of new COAS General Asfaq Perviz Kyani to all the Army officers not to meet with politicians the role of Army intelligence agencies in politics will also be minimised and elections will not be delayed.

Asif Ali Zardari will restart the election campaign of PPP from Liaquat Bagh Rawalpindi next month where his wife and leader Benazir Bhutto was assassinated on December 27th 2007. New PPP Co-chairperson is also planning to make Lahore as his future party headquarters because he got lot of positive response from the Punjab province after his first press conference where he made it clear that PPP will continue the politics of federation.

He will soon give some responsibilities to important leaders from Punjab including Chaudhry Aizaz Ahsan after consulting the Central Executive Committee of PPP. Zardari is confident people of Punjab will play the same role in coming elections which they played in 1970 when PPP emerged as the single largest party in West Pakistan with the help of people from Punjab.

He is sure that if the establishment will tolerate the majority of PPP in Punjab then he will be in a position to make more confidence building measures with 'power that be'.

Meanwhile, Pakistani police arrested five suspected militants early yesterday who planned to use cyanide powder to poison water during the Shia Muslim festival of Ashura, a police official said.

The militants, who belonged to Sunni extremist groups, were planning to launch an attack Sunday on the Ashura festival in Karachi, provincial police chief Azhar Farooqi, told a news conference.

The aim was to cause widespread human losses, Farooqi said. The five, including a would-be suicide bomber, were arrested in Karachi, while three others involved in the plot were detained earlier in the nearby city of Hyderabad.

Police recovered six kilogrammes of explosives to be placed in the suicide bomber's jacket, three hand grenades, six detonators, two pistols and two kilogrammes of pellets, Farooqi said.

"We have also recovered from them 500 grammes of lethal cyanide which they had planned to mix with the water distributed at kiosks established specially during Ashura," he said.

Pakistan is on high alert ahead of the weekend Muslim festival of Ashura, which is often hit by sectarian violence. Ashura is when Shias commemorate the death of the Prophet Mohammed's grandson in the seventh century.

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi has strong links to Osama bin Laden's network and its members have been convicted of involvement in the 2002 murder of US reporter Daniel Pearl and in several attempts to kill Pervez Musharraf.

Bill Gates
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He also explained how the programme has been contributing to the alleviation of poverty.

Zia
FROM PAGE 16
and Rizvi Ahmed accompanied Delwar.

BNP standing committee nominated Acting Secretary General Maj (ret) Hafiz Uddin Ahmed along with leaders of his faction placed wreaths and offered fatiha at about 12:30pm.

Pakistani troops

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"Security forces used artillery, mortars and small-arms fire to engage the miscreants. Reportedly, 50-60 miscreants were killed and (the rest of them) dispersed," it said.

There were no casualties among troops, it added.

Separately, in the Chaghmalai area of South Waziristan, militants ambushed a convoy moving from the main town of Wana, prompting a fierce one-hour gun battle, the statement added.

Between 20 and 30 rebels were killed, while four troops were injured and two army vehicles damaged, it added.

Pakistani helicopter gunships also opened fire on two suspect cars near a third fort in South Waziristan on Thursday, killing a further eight militants, it said.

The growing boldness of the militants in challenging Pakistani troops is set to provoke a bloody showdown in the tribal belt, with pressure on Islamabad to take action against Mehsud.

Musharraf's government issued a purported telephone recording of Mehsud, the day after Benazir Bhutto's death, in which he is said to congratulate one of his followers for her assassination.

But many Pakistanis are sceptical about the tape, and also about the conflicting official accounts of whether she died from a gunshot wound, a suicide blast or a head injury from her car sunroof.

The country has also seen no let-up in a wave of suicide bombings that have killed nearly 900 people in the past year, with an attack on a Shia mosque in the northwestern city of Peshawar on Thursday leaving 10 people dead.

Echoing Hayden's claims about a "nexus" of extremist groups, Pakistani officials said they believed the Sunni extremist group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, which has close links to both Mehsud and al-Qaeda, was behind the Peshawar attack.

"The bomber first fired some shots and then blew himself up. The modus operandi is the hallmark of Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and it shows they have plans to stoke up sectarian hatred," a senior security official told AFP.

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Talking to reporters, Khandaker Delwar said BNP is united under the leadership of Khaleda Zia. He said BNP is committed to the ideals of late president Ziaur Rahman and vowed to free Khaleda to ensure democracy and development in the country.

"There is no split in BNP," he said, adding that some leaders were misguided for reasons already known to the people.

Maj (ret) Hafiz said Zia introduced the politics of development and production to make Bangladesh a self-reliant country. He urged the party men to take a fresh vow to follow the ideals of Ziaur Rahman.

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70 people killed

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building, he said. Amid the rubble was found yellow headbands and anti-government literature.

Two policemen were killed by teenage snipers during Saturday's clashes in Nasiriyah. The snipers, two 14-year-old boys, were quickly arrested, police said.

Police officials said at least 35 cultists were killed in Basra and 18 in Nasiriyah. A total of 14 police, two Iraqi soldiers and two civilians were also killed.

At least 25 cultists were arrested in Nasiriyah and 75 in Basra.

Followers of the cult, led by Ahmed al-Hassani al-Yamani, seek to hasten the return of Imam Mahdi, an eighth century imam who vanished as a boy and whom Shias believe will return to bring justice to the world.

Yamani has his own website on which he claims to be an ambassador for the Mahdi, whom he says is imminently to re-appear.

The fighting comes as around two million Shias have descended on the holy city of Karbala in central Iraq for Saturday's climax of the Ashura rituals, which commemorate the killing of Imam Hussein by armies of the Sunni caliph Yazid in 680.

During Ashura last January, another militant sect dubbing itself the Jund al-Samaa, or "Soldiers of Heaven," clashed with US and Iraqi forces outside Karbala and another holy Shia city, Najaf.

Last year's fighting left 263 sect followers dead, including their leader Dhia Abdul Zahra Kadhim al-Krimawi, also known as Abu Kamar, who believed he was descended from the Prophet Mohammed.

Proceedings in Karbala were continuing peacefully, governor of the province Agil al-Khazali told a press conference on Saturday.

"Two million people have come to Karbala for Ashura," he said.

"There have been no security violations so far and the ceremonies have gone ahead without incident."

"We are preparing buses to take people home," he added.

Thaksin allies

FROM PAGE 16
two thirds of the 480 seats in parliament, he said.

"This will ensure that the government can last a long time," he said.

Samak, 72, refused to say if he would become the next prime minister, although he now appears to be a top contender.

Parliament will open on Monday and could choose a new prime minister within a week, he said.

Thai King Bhumibol Adulyadej then must give his official approval, a formality that normally takes a few days.

Although the party won the election -- the first since a bloodless coup in September 2006 -- their