

1,493 more arrested

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8:00am yesterday morning. Meanwhile at a press briefing held at the Police Headquarters yesterday, Nur Mohammad, the inspector general of police (IGP), said the one-month-long special drives, launched on May 28, are not intended to harass any political leaders and activists. The special drives have been launched primarily for two reasons -- to improve the 'deteriorating' law and order situation during last few months and to impose precautionary measures ahead of the upcoming national elections, he said.

Looting of firearms from police in Rajshahi and Gazipur and the rise in number of killings in the city are signs of deterioration of the situation, he pointed out. Brushing aside the allegations of harassment to political activists, the IGP said 6,043 of the arrests were made as there have been pending warrants for their arrest.

A press release issued by the Police Headquarters said only 39 of the arrestees were political leaders or activists. Of them, 20 are from Awami League, 17 from BNP, one from Jamaat and one from Kalyan Party.

The IGP said the ongoing special drives have five objectives -- execution of arrest warrants, recovery of illegal arms, arrest of convicts, recovery of illicit drugs and arrest of individuals possessing illegal arms.

Rapid Action Battalion Director General Hasan Mahmud Khan and DMP Commissioner Naim Ahmed were also present during the briefing.

Our Rangpur correspondent adds: Police arrested 43 alleged criminals in eight upazilas of the district during the last 24 hours till filing of the report.

The arrestees are accused in different criminal cases, said sources in police control room. Since May 31, police arrested 129 alleged criminals in the district.

Our correspondent from Kushtia adds: The joint forces on Sunday night arrested editor of a local daily newspaper and chairman of a union parishad (UP).

Joint forces confirmed the arrests of Manjur Ehsan Choudhury, editor of local daily Andoloner Bazar, and advocate Akram Hossain Dulal, chairman of Joteehazra UP.

Manjur is also Kushtia correspondent of Channel-1, while Dulal is the president of Khokha upazila unit Juba League.

They two were handed over to Kushtia sadar police. They were sent to district jail yesterday after being shown arrested under section 16(2) of the Emergency Power Rules (EPR).

Our Kushtia correspondent adds: The joint forces arrested 16 people including a listed criminal from Meherpur district.

The listed criminal, Kalu Kubbati Ali from Bhaberpara in Mujibnagar, is accused in at least seven cases.

Our Barisal correspondent reports: The joint forces raided Paradise Hotel-2 in the town and arrested its director Ashrafuzzaman Anis under EPR.

Our Rajshahi correspondent

adds: The joint forces yesterday arrested a BNP activist from Belgharia area in Durgapur upazila, bringing the number of arrested grassroots political activists in the district to five.

The BNP activist, Sabdul Islam, has been held under the EPR. He is accused in several cases.

Tripura

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Commerce and Trade Minister Jitendra Chowdhury to a parliamentary standing committee on commerce that visited the state recently.

The Ashuganj river port is about 25km from Tripura and Chittagong seaport is around 75km away. If transshipment is introduced between the two countries using these two ports, Tripura could become the commercial gateway of the North East, Jitendra argued in a charter of demands submitted to the committee.

The Tripura government also demanded development of infrastructure to enhance trade with Bangladesh and north-eastern Indian states.

"We have demanded improvement of land customs stations on both sides of the border, repairing and widening of roads, connecting Akhaura and Agartala by rail and facility to use Ashuganj and Chittagong ports," Jitendra said.

The seven-member parliamentary team also visited customs stations at Akhaura check post and held discussions with Jitendra, and the importers and exporters of Tripura on the possibility of increasing trade with Bangladesh.

While Bangladesh has a huge trade gap with India, the Indian state Tripura too suffers from such imbalance when it comes to trade with the neighbouring country.

Outlaw killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A member of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) was killed yesterday in crossfire between Rab and his accomplices at Namkan village of Bagmara upazila.

The dead was identified as Abdur Rashid alias Sagor, 28, son of Ishaq Ali of Jhikra Joanbhagpara village.

In a press release, Rab said when the law enforcers conducted a drive at Namkan village at about 2:30am, a gang of terrorists opened fire on them prompting the Rab members to retaliate.

Rashid sustained bullet injuries during the shootout while his cohorts managed to escape the scene.

He was rushed to a local health complex where the on-duty doctor declared him dead.

Rab said Rashid was accused in a number of cases on different charges including murder, extortion and robbery.

The law enforcers recovered a shutter gun, a bullet, an empty cartridge, two machetes and two knives from the scene.

Dhaka down

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inch by inch on Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue during the peak hours at 5:00pm.

The situation in the lanes and bi-lanes was even worse, as hundreds of rickshaws were stranded in queues.

At places, it took about two hours to commute just three to four kilometres of distance. Many left their vehicles on roads and started walking to their destinations braving the rain, as the congestion seemed to be never-ending.

"For nearly an hour, our bus stood still at Banani. I have never experienced anything like this before," said Shamima, a service holder, who reached Karwan Bazar from Banani in the evening after two and half hours.

Students from schools, colleges and universities in different parts of the city found no way but to walk to their homes as they failed to get any transport.

Many did the same in the afternoon once the rain stopped after pouring for over three hours.

"I started from Shyamali and I found that the vehicles are at a complete standstill in the Manik Mia Avenue and Farmgate area," said Md Al Mamun, who was heading for Shahbagh on foot at about 5:00pm.

The traffic situation seemed to improve a little after 8:00pm, with vehicular movement gaining momentum in the streets.

IOJ to join talks

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last night, "We have already informed alliance leaders that we will take part in dialogue with the government."

The government has invited them to take part in the dialogue on June 10, he told The Daily Star.

Jamaat-e-Islami, a major partner in the alliance, is yet to finalise its decision in this regard although party leaders had earlier said dialogue will not be fruitful without participation of the top leaders of three major parties -- BNP, Awami League and Jamaat.

Moreover, IOJ leaders plan to propose holding national election by November this year.

Meanwhile, detained top leader of the four-party Khaleda Zia, during her first appearance before court on Sunday demanded national election by October.

Earlier, BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain took an initiative steps to make the alliance active as part of preparations for a movement to restore democracy in the country.

Following this, alliance leaders met on May 22 at Delwar's residence and prepared a 14-point charter of demand that include release of Khaleda, withdrawal of all cases against her and ensuring her participation in the dialogue.

Later, the BNP secretary general announced that his party would not take part in dialogue without its chairperson as it (dialogue) would not be meaningful without her.

"It would be better for all of us if the four-party alliance takes up a common stand on all important issues like participation in dialogue," a senior BNP leader said. He however declined to comment on IOJ's decision to join the dialogue.

Sources in the BNP said Khaleda Zia recently asked Delwar to unite nationalist forces, and his initiative in this regard followed this.

Delwar

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also the founder of the BNP.

Referring to the guidelines he received from detained chairperson during one-to-one parley on Sunday, Delwar said she stated in the dock that this government is "parasitic" and "illegal".

Party source said the chairperson, during her closed-door meeting with Delwar, asked to remain united and prepare for movement to restore democracy in the country.

Criticising the government for launching the crackdown on the political activists, Delwar said the government is arresting the political leaders and workers in a bid to thwart the possible movement against it.

Political leaders have been arrested in the name of curbing terrorism but the real culprits are still in safe den, he said.

Presided over by JCD acting President Sultan Salahuddin Tuku, the meeting was also addressed, among others, by party's joint secretaries general Selima Rahman, Nazrul Islam Khan and Goyeswar Chandra Roy, acting Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed and JCD General Secretary Sahful Bari Babu.

6 killed

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killing three passengers on the spot and injuring 33 others.

The injured were admitted to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital (MMCH) and Trishal Upazila Health Complex. Of them, three succumbed to their injuries at the MMCH soon after admission and their identity could not be known.

Police seized the buses, but their drivers and helpers fled the scene immediately after the accident.

Hasina calls for halt

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During the hearing, the court witnessed a heated row between the defence and the prosecution over the latter's disclosure of a defence intelligence report, after Public Prosecutor ABM Sharfuddin Khan Mukul presented a military intelligence report before the court.

He told the court that the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) discouraged and raised objections to the purchase of MiG-29 warplanes as the purchase was unnecessary and was done by wasting state funds.

Raising an objection, the defence asked the prosecution why the DGFI report was presented. Defence lawyer Syed Rezaur Rahman asked the public prosecutor whether DGFI disclosed the report without being asked for it.

At that time, former army chief Gen (ret'd) Mustafizur Rahman stood up in the dock and asked the prosecutor to say who was the chief of DGFI during the time in question.

Echoing the former army chief, Hasina also raised questions about the propriety of making the defence intelligence agency's report public.

"It should be questioned whether the report prepared by an intelligence agency can be produced before the court and made public in this manner. As a former head of the government, I may raise the matter for legal clarification," Hasina told the court.

The judge then asked the prosecutor to explain, but the prosecutor had no answer.

After the debate, the public prosecutor read out the report to the court and said expensive MiG-29 warplanes were not a necessity for the country's air force, since impoverished countries like Bangladesh just cannot afford the cost of maintaining those aircraft.

An AL government led by Sheikh Hasina purchased eight high-end MiG-29 warplanes causing losses of hundreds of crores of taka to the state, he said.

The prosecution appealed to the court to frame charges against the accused under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Hasina said she was concerned about protecting the country's independence and sovereignty, and that is why she purchased the warplanes for the state's air force.

Explaining the reasons behind the purchase of the supersonic warplanes, she said, "Our military policy is defensive, but we have to protect ourselves if the nation comes under attack. And I purchased the warplanes for the sake of our protection. Is it a criminal offence? If I am to stand in the dock for this offence then I am worried about the independence and sovereignty of our country."

She also said it is the responsibility of a government to well equip a country's armed forces including the air force, to protect the country's independence and sovereignty.

"If the public prosecutor questions the purchase of an essential instrument for national safeguard, then we all should be worried about our sovereignty," she added.

The defence counsels told the court that there is no credible evidence for framing charges against their client, Hasina.

Later, talking to reporters, **Falu gets 5yrs**

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with his officials and employees use the CI sheets in his infrastructure.

The case was later brought under the Emergency Power Rules (EPR) on February 18 last year and Sheikh Abdus Salam, assistant director of the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC), was made the investigation officer (IO).

The court framed charges against the accused on February 7 this year.

Asked for reaction, Falu's counsels told newsmen they will file an appeal with the High Court. They said the factory officials and employees did not see the seal that read "Relief materials of Relief and Rehabilitation Department: Not for Sale".

Public Prosecutor ASM Golam Fattah told reporters he expected life-term imprisonment since the relief was meant for the destitute. He added Falu misappropriated the relief and benefited financially from it.

Falu was arrested at his Cantonment residence in the capital on charge of corruption on February 6 last year.

Owner of private satellite television channels ntv and Rtv and daily Amar Desh, he is facing five cases -- three for misappropriating relief materials and two for concealing information in his wealth statement submitted to ACC and dodging tax.

National Board of Revenue on May 27 filed the last case against him on charge of dodging Tk 2.75 crore income taxes during 1996-2006.

Jute mill closed after workers ransack office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Production in the state-owned Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills was suspended yesterday for an indefinite period after about 200 workers of the factory turned violent during a demonstration demanding payment of their arrears.

Police said the agitating workers laid siege to the administrative building of the mill at about 9:30am demanding payment of their arrears.

They became enraged when Project Director Mokaddes Hossain and other high officials refused to give them any fixed date for payment.

The angry workers started throwing stones and bricks at the office of the project director, administrative buildings and staff quarters after the project director and other officials had left the scene at about 10:00am.

Police and security guards, who were on duty at the mill, fired at least five blank shots to disperse the angry workers, sources said.

The residence of the project director also came under attack.

On information, law enforcers rushed to the scene and dispersed the agitating workers by charging baton on them.

A large number of policemen were deployed in and around the mill at about 12:00noon.

Major changes

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Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division Lt Gen Masud Uddin Chowdhury was transferred to National Defence College (NDC) as its commandant, while outgoing Commandant of NDC Lt Gen ATM Zahurul Alam was deputed to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for posting abroad.

The sources said Zahurul Alam is expected to be appointed to the post of the high commissioner in Australia, which has been vacant for over a year now.

General Officer Commanding (GOC) of Chittagong Area Maj Gen Abdul Mobin was appointed as the Principal Staff Officer (PSO) of the Armed Forces Division.

GOC of 11 Infantry Division and Bogra Area Maj Gen Mohammad Shamim Chowdhury was transferred to Chittagong area.

None so far however has been appointed to Bogra area.

Meanwhile, Chief of Army Staff Gen Moeen U Ahmed called on President Iajuddin Ahmed in Bangabhaban yesterday.

Gono Forum

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speed up preparations for the elections.

"It needs to be emphasised that to create an environment of confidence and security, the emergency state must be progressively relaxed and withdrawn completely well before the polls."

Commerce Adviser Zillur Rahman agreed with the proposals, saying they will look into those.

He remained optimistic about the chances of the dialogue's success, saying democratic forces came together in 1990 to solve the nation's problems through dialogues.

Foreign missions

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missions, which also followed statements made by US Charge d'affaires Geeta Pasi.

A ministry spokesman in a press release said a number of recent reports published in the media cite statements made by foreign missions which may be construed as interference in the internal affairs of Bangladesh.

"The Ministry of Foreign Affairs would hope that any such statements that may give rise to such interpretations should be avoided," he added.

A spokesperson from the US embassy Sunday said they asked the government to explain why the arrests were made.

"We understand that many people, including political party leaders, have been arrested over the past several days. We are seeking clarification from the government regarding the reasons behind these arrests," a US embassy spokesman told UNB Sunday.

The US spokesman said the American government has always called on Bangladesh to observe international human rights standards by extending full legal rights to individuals under arrest or under trial.

Death of student

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hundred students of the university gathered at the scene of accident at about 10:30am and put up barricades on the road and formed a human chain demanding exemplary punishment to the persons responsible.

They also demanded setting up of a speed breaker there.

Later, the students removed the barricades from the road at around 1:00pm after the high-ups of law enforcement agencies assured them of setting up a speed breaker by yesterday following directives of the acting Chittagong City Corporation Mayor M Manjur Alam.

The officer-in-charge of Chandgaon Police Station (PS) said the authorities concerned started constructing a speed breaker there at around 3:00pm.

Talks, polls

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and repression" on its leaders across the country.

At a secretary-level meeting, AL asked the government to stop the crackdown and demanded immediate release of the arrestees.

The meeting was held at party chief Sheikh Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi with AL Acting General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam in the chair.

"Without any reason, a good number of our party leaders and workers have been arrested. These arrests have been made to complicate the prevailing situation and in this situation, it is not possible to hold dialogue and election meaningfully," Syed Ashrafur Islam told reporters after the meeting.

Alleging that the arrests were politically motivated, he said the police started raiding houses of AL leaders across the country after the party's extended meeting had been held in the capital on May 26.

Ashraf said they would send a letter with its decision on dialogue to the chief adviser's office within a couple of days.

Replying to a query on whether the AL will form an alliance with the BNP following Khaleda Zia's call for an all-party unity, the AL leader vehemently rejected the idea and said that as a secular political party, AL would never go for any coalition with the "fundamental and radical" BNP and Jamaat.

"There will never be any unity with them as they are solely responsible for the current situation. Their widespread corruption, politicisation and misuse from 2001 to 2006 led to 1/11," Ashraf said.

"When the Sector Commanders' Forum has been urging all political parties not to join hands with the anti-liberation war forces, the BNP is trying to revive its coalition with Jamaat," he added.

The meeting also decided to send forms and instructions to the party's district, upazila, thana and union level leaders by tomorrow for the mass signature collection to press home the party's six-point demand, including the release of Hasina.

The meeting also decided to make a synopsis on the organisational reports submitted by the grassroots level leaders from the party's 72 organisational districts at the extended meeting on May 26.

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The two detained militants admitted to journalists that they took part in the grenade attack aimed at assassinating AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

However, the court ordered to send Uzzal to the Dhaka Central Jail as the investigation officer of the case and ASP of the Criminal Investigation Department Fazlul Kabir did not file any petition for his remand.

He produced the two before the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court and submitted a forwarding report seeking a 10-day remand for Sabuj.

In the forwarding report, the IO said Hujji leader Mufti Abdul Hannan in his confessional statement mentioned the name of Sabuj as one of the grenade throwers. He needs to be placed on a 10-day remand to find out whereabouts of the others involved in the grenade attacks, the IO added.

3 JMB men

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Earlier, the prosecution and the defence had completed their arguments and the court recorded statements of 24 witnesses.

According to the prosecution, a team of Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) raided the house of Russell's brother-in-law Sultan Bepari at Ashkona, Uttara, in January 2006.

They arrested the three JMB men from the house and seized 71 items including ammonium nitrate, detonators, iron rods, iron sheets, batteries, gunpowder, 27 wrist watches, electric circuits, electronic metres, time devices and different other bomb making materials from their possession.

The arrestees gave confessional statements to magistrate, saying that they had possessed those materials for making bombs to carry out attacks at different places.

Earlier, all the three were convicted for blasting bombs at different places across the country.

Tofail's wife

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Sessions Judge's Court in Dhaka yesterday granted bail to former lawmaker Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu's wife Nasirakhat Kalpana in a corruption case.

Judge Azizul Haq granted her bail when she surrendered to the court and prayed for bail.

On May 29, (ACC) Deputy Director Golam Shahrier Chowdhury filed a case with Ramna police station against former minister Tofail Ahmed for amassing Tk 2.45 crore wealth, which is inconsistent with Tofail's known sources of income, and concealing information about Tk 1.86 crore in his health statement submitted to the ACC. His wife and daughter were charged with abetting him in doing so.

An HC bench comprising Justice Khondker Musa Khaled and Justice Moeenul Islam Chowdhury heard the bail petition filed by Anwara and Taslima Zaman yesterday. Both appeared before the court.

Their counsel barrister M Amirul Islam submitted before the court that since the ACC did not issue any notice to the petitioners for their wealth statements before filing the case against them, the case is malafide.

He also said as per amended provisions of the Emergency Power Rules (EPR), if co-accused in a case are women and children they will be granted bail.

ACC's counsel Khurshid Alam Khan opposed their bail prayer.

Pintu and his wife were accused of amassing illegal wealth worth Tk 21.89 crore and concealing that in the wealth statement submitted to the ACC.

The ACC filed the case against them on June 6 last year, and the investigation officer pressed charges on October 2.

Talks, polls

Asked about the Dhaka City committee's plan to form a 'human chain' around the special jail where Hasina has been detained, he said they would discuss the matter with city leaders within a couple of days and fix a date.

Euro inflation is 'uncomfortable'

BBC Online

Eurozone interest rates should not fall because inflation is at 'uncomfortably high levels', the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has said.

Eurozone inflation was 3.6% in May, well above the European Central Bank's (ECB) target rate of about 2%.

But the IMF predicted that the rate would fall below 2% late next year without a rate rise.

The IMF also revised its forecast for eurozone growth this year upwards from 1.4% to 1.75%.

"In these circumstances, it is appropriate to keep policy rates on hold," its report said.

The IMF also reported on the Russian economy yesterday.

It said the rouble should be allowed to appreciate to prevent the economy from overheating but warned that inflation could still hit 14% this year.

The organisation said that a stronger rouble would not damage the competitiveness of Russian companies.

Israel's housing move contrary to international law: UN

AFP, United Nations

UN boss Ban Ki-moon is deeply concerned at Israel's decision to build 884 more houses in east Jerusalem, which is 'contrary to international law', his press office said yesterday in a statement.

"The secretary general is deeply concerned at the recent announcement by the Israeli government to invite new tenders for construction in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem," the statement added.

"The government of Israel's continued construction in settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory is contrary to international law and to its commitments under the roadmap and the Annapolis process," it said.

Drafted by the United States, the European Union, Russia and the United Nations, the roadmap for Middle East peace calls for a halt to Jewish settlement activity in Palestinian territories and an end to Palestinian attacks against Israel.

The plan has made little progress since it was drafted in 2003, but Israel and the Palestinians agreed last November to re-launch it during a conference in the US city of Annapolis that restarted the peace process after a seven-year hiatus.

On Sunday, Israel announced plans to build 884 more houses in occupied and annexed east Jerusalem, in a move that enraged the Palestinians who have demanded it has the capital of a promised state.

The Palestinians have repeatedly called the expansion of settlements in the West Bank including east Jerusalem the biggest obstacle to a final peace deal.

Danish embassy

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militant insurgency.

Moeller said a Pakistani cleaner employed at the embassy died and three local employees were hurt, but the embassy's four Danish staffers including the charge d'affaires were unharmed.