

BDR gunfire sparks panic on DU campus

Female students evacuated from two halls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Gunfire at BDR headquarters at Pikhana in the city caused widespread panic among the students of nearby Dhaka University.

The campus became almost deserted by 12:00noon as students left the campus hurriedly feeling as if the gunfire broke out on the campus.

The Dhaka University authorities also evacuated about 850 female students from two dormitories -- Begum Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall and Bangladesh Kuwait-Moitree Hall -- in New Market area, which are close to the BDR headquarters.

Classes were also suspended after 12:00noon as students started rushing out of the campus to move to safer places.

To protest the gunfire, leaders and activists of Chhatra League and left-leaning students' organisations brought out separate processions on the campus.

In other dormitories, students were glued to television channels for updated news about the situation.

Panic gripped students of Fazilatunnesa and Kuwait-Moitree halls soon after the gunfire started. They did not dare to come out of their dormitories as the hall authorities closed the main gate at around 10:15am. Students were also asked not to move freely on the upper floors.

Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique told reporters that the authorities have decided to evacuate the students from Fazilatunnesa and Kuwait-Moitree halls to ensure their security.

The female students were shifted to Rokeya Hall, Shamsunnahar Hall and to the building of Bangladesh Cadet Corps on the campus.

The process of shifting students started at around 6:00pm. They were brought to the main campus by the university's buses.

Tuli, a Masters student and resident of Fazilatunnesa Mujib Hall, was close to tears.

"It was horrible. All of us were brought downstairs together," said Tuli after she was shifted to Shamsunnahar Hall.

"Our parents were also scared. They kept on calling the girls all the day long," she added.

Earlier, DU vice chancellor, pro-vice chancellor and treasurer visited the two halls and asked the students not to get panicked and stay calm.

The Institute of Social Welfare and Research held its classes for about an hour in the morning but had to suspend the academic activities due to this dreadful fight in their neighbourhoods.

The teachers and the students could not come out as the

main gate was closed, but some of them were seen jumping over the wall to move to a safer place.

DU authorities took the decision at an emergency meeting with Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique in the chair.

The meeting, held at the vice chancellor's office in the afternoon, also postponed all examinations scheduled for today at Arts Building and Curzon Hall.

Fresh date of the exams would be declared soon.

However, the schedule for the other examinations will remain unchanged.

Besides, the viva voce of D Unit admission test could not be held after 12:00noon.

Sources said Abbas Uddin and Jakir Hossain, employees of Fazilatunnesa Hall and Kuwait Moitree Hall, were injured as shells from the BDR Headquarters hit them in the morning.

They were shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

BNP calls on all sides to show restraint

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP, the main opposition in parliament, has expressed grave concern over the mutiny by BDR jawans and called upon all sides to reach a logical conclusion by exercising restraint and patience.

"The government did not inform the people or us of details about the incident," BNP said last night in a written statement signed by Maruf Kamal Khan Sobel, chief of media cell of the party.

"Like the countrymen, we are also worried to know what is going on in the BDR headquarters from the media," it added.

Meanwhile, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia postponed a meeting of the party's national standing committee, which was scheduled to begin at 7:00pm yesterday.

Instead, the chairperson

discussed the latest situation of the country with some leaders of the party.

Party secretary general Khandaker Delwar Hossain, standing committee members Saifur Rahman, Khandaker Mosharrif Hossain, Moudud Ahmed, Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahabubur Rahman, Jamiruddin Sircar, Salauddin Quader Chowdhury MP and MK Anwar MP were present at the meeting.

Earlier, BNP Standing Committee member Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahabubur Rahman told The Daily Star that a judicial investigation should be carried out to find out the reasons behind the mutiny.

He also said it is a good news that the prime minister has put an end to this suffocating situation by announcing amnesty, as the entire nation was worried all day long.

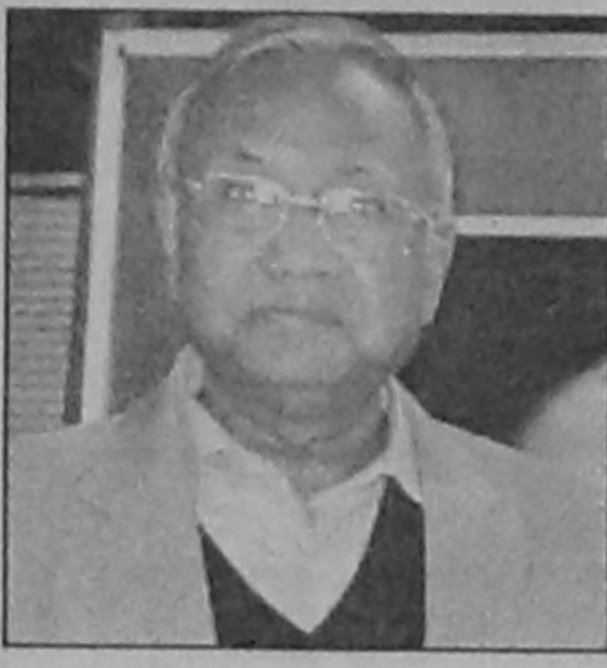
Bangla-Nepal mountaineers plan Himalayan expedition

UNB, Dhaka

Mountaineers of Nepal and Bangladesh are planning a joint expedition to a Himalayan peak that would eventually be named Nepal-Bangladesh Friendship Peak, said a report from Katmandu.

The Nepalese winner of three world records and nine-time Everest climber Pemba Dorje Sherpa has recently made the proposal.

Founder of Bangladesh Mountaineering and Trekking Club (BMTK) and an explorer to Antarctica and North Pole Enam Ul Haque present on the occasion lauded the proposal and announced participation of the mountaineers of BMTK in the expedition. "It will be an extraordinary opportunity for us to express friendship between the two great nations through mountaineering," Haque was quoted as saying.



Bazlur Rahman's first anniversary of death today

METRO DESK

Today is the first death anniversary of Bazlur Rahman, former editor of the Sangbad.

On the occasion, Bazlur Rahman Foundation has taken elaborate programmes including placing of wreaths at his grave at Mirpur Martyred Intellectuals' Graveyard at 9:00am, day-long Qurankhwani and milad and doa mahfil at his residence at 1/2 Ramna Apartment Complex at Maghbazar in the city after Asr prayers today.

Bazlur Rahman memorial lecture titled 'Democracy and journalism' will be held at Shilpakala Academy auditorium in the city at 4:00pm on February 27. The publication ceremony of a memorial book will also be held at the function.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will be present as the chief guest at the programme while Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui will present the Bazlur Rahman memorial lecture.

Bazlur Rahman, husband of Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, passed away due to cardiac arrest at the Ibrahim Cardiac Hospital on this day last year.

Abdul Kuddus Sadi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ninth death anniversary of litterateur and journalist Abdul Kuddus Sadi will be observed today.

Sadi, a life member of Bangla Academy and Nazrul Academy, was also the editor of now defunct Weekly Padakkhep.

Qurankhwani and doa mahfil will be held at Modhubagh Madrasa near his residence today on the occasion.

Tribal leader Shekhar shot in Rangamati

UNB, Rangamati

Reformist tribal leader Chandra Shekhar Chakma, former secretary of Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity, was shot and wounded in the district town yesterday morning.

He was taken to General Hospital from where he was shifted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital at about 11:30am.

Chandra Shekhar said a tribal youth shot him in his right chest 'from a close range' at Chamaknagar while he was returning home from bazaar at about 10:00am.

State Minister for CHT Affairs Dipangkar Talukder visited him at the hospital.



Garment workers put up a barricade on Dewanhat intersection in Chittagong city yesterday demanding payment of arrears.

OMS of rice to start

FROM PAGE 16

queries, the prime minister in her scripted answers, which were tabled, said the government has already formed a high level committee to study the feasibility of food rationing.

"The government will take a decision after receiving the committee report," said the PM, who could not attend the question-answer session as she was busy with resolving the BDR unrest at the time.

Hasina also mentioned a number of measures taken to bring down prices of essentials.

Steps have been taken for import or purchase of locally produced lentil, onion, sugar and soybean oil by Trading Corporation of Bangladesh

(TCB), and sale of those to people at fair price, she said.

According to the PM's scripted answers, the TCB will import or purchase from local market 3,000 tonnes of lentil, 5,000 tonnes of soybean oil, 1,000 tonnes of sugar, 100 tonnes of onion and 100 tonnes of chickpea this fiscal year.

The premier blamed the immediate past caretaker government for letting the prices of essentials go beyond the commoners' reach.

WEEKLY HOLIDAY

Responding to a query from Awami League lawmaker Meher Afroz, the PM said the government has no plan right now to introduce weekly holiday on Sunday, instead of Friday.

"Overall review is required to introduce weekly holiday on Sunday."

Hasina said 36 Muslim countries out of 57 in the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) have weekly holiday on Sunday.

The countries include Pakistan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Turkey, Brunei, Morocco, Tunisia, Lebanon, Uzbekistan, Albania, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Gabon, Suriname, Guyana, Cameroon, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Gambia, Uganda, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Togo, Niger, Nigeria, Chad, Mali, Zebuti, Sen Leon, Benin, Burkynafaso, Mozambique and Comoros, she mentioned.

Amnesty follows

FROM PAGE 1

The prime minister urged BDR men to surrender their arms and return to their barracks. She also assured them of considering their demands.

"The prime minister announced general amnesty after the BDR personnel asked for it," State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Jahangir Kabir Nanak told reporters after the meeting.

Nanak said the prime minister listened to the emotion-choked words of the BDR personnel and hoped that discipline would return to the force.

The state minister said the prime minister hoped that they would allow the injured to get treatment and give safe passage to women and children who were trapped inside the BDR headquarters.

At the short press briefing, BDR Deputy Assistant Director Shawkat said they had a long discussion with the prime minister, who assured them of giving general amnesty and

meeting their demands. "We also assured the prime minister that all BDR men would surrender their weapons and return to barracks."

Nanak said they went to the BDR headquarters after the prime minister asked them to do so, so that the already terrifying situation could not escalate.

Earlier, Nanak and Whip of Jatiya Sangsad Mirza Azam went to Pikhana several hours after the firing began. Using megaphones, they urged BDR men to show restraint and stop shooting.

Before entering the BDR headquarters, the two raised white flags with BDR men as a sign of peace. After a brief discussion, Nanak and Azam emerged with the delegation of BDR men.

They then went to the residence of the prime minister, where Hasina and her senior cabinet and party colleagues were having an emergency meeting to find ways to end the crisis.

Chiefs of three forces--the army, the navy and the air force--were also present at the meeting.

After the gun battle erupted in the morning, troops from Dhaka Cantonment were sent to Pikhana. Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) personnel were also deployed outside the BDR headquarters only to face heavy gunfire from the BDR headquarters.

Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) of the Ministry of Defence in a press release said the government around noon urged the rebel soldiers to surrender their arms and return to barracks.

It said the prime minister, who is in charge of the defence ministry, is ready to listen to the demands of the mutineers.

The press release also carried a note of warning that if the rebels take the law into their own hands and do not refrain from destructive acts even after this announcement, "stern actions" would be taken against them.

Bullets buzz in the air

FROM PAGE 1

They were fortifying their entrances. We heard a voice over a megaphone. The mutineers were asking for unity among themselves.

We got down from the building as the Rab men found it too risky. Firstly it was in clear view from the BDR gate, and secondly mortar shells were being fired.

Outside, about 40 to 50 army personnel had arrived with rocket launchers, heavy machine guns and mortars. They climbed over a wall and went into an alley, closer to the BDR barracks. We followed them.

An army officer held a camouflaged megaphone and started urging the rebels to lay down their arms, but the mutineers kept on firing.

AT RISHIPARA, NEAR GATE FOUR

A woman wearing a pink dress stood still against the iron grille of a balcony, unfazed by the intermittent gunfire around her. A little girl in a red dress was also in a similar state whose eyes were fixed on two soldiers guarding the Rishipara boundary of the BDR headquarters. They all were within the BDR compound, as we looked at them from a house just across the road from the boundary wall.

Except the two expressionless faces in a residential quarter of the BDR compound, no other yellow colour residential building seemed to have any sign of life from afar, late in the afternoon.

It seemed that family members of most of the mutinying soldiers had already fled.

"Our lives are not safe here," said a horrified housewife, Fahima, who was running through the street just outside the BDR compound wall along with another woman. They both were fleeing from their homes adjacent to the BDR compound.

Fahima's companion was weeping in fear, as we tried to talk to her she said, "Please, let us run to safety. Talk to somebody else."

"It has been a terrible experience since the morning...

army Bell chopper was circling high overhead. It kept circling over the BDR complex. As it came for the fifth round, there was an ear piercing noise, and seconds later another. High in the air, there were two white puffs.

"They are firing mortars," an army lieutenant colonel who now serves in Rab, said. "They are taking shots at the chopper."

We could see the BDR sepoy taking potshots at the chopper with their carbines held high. The chopper went away.

A brief lull descended. And we took the chance to run with our heads held down, chased by gunfire from behind.

"Take shelter," the Rab official shouted. We were now near the Japan Bangladesh Friendship Hospital.

We looked behind and saw a BDR sepoy holding a machine gun with both hands. And then saw smoke coming out of it with a long sharp rattle. Bullets skidded off the walls of the hospital, hitting a few cooling units of split air-conditioners.

We were now safely behind the hospital. Another injured man in his 20s was carried into the hospital. His left leg dangling, covered in blood. There was no sign of pain on his face, only a dazed look.

It was around 12:00pm and the army had arrived. We could see the army marching down the road towards the BDR headquarters. Immediately there was a spray of bullets from the mutineers.

The Rab men knocked open the door of the hospital and we clambered up the fire escape. From the top floor, we had a clear view inside the BDR complex. Two machine guns on wheels were positioned behind the gate. Four BDR men were posted atop a small porch beside the gate.

Depos were walking up and down the driveway. They were clearly in the line of fire. We could see a truck lumbering in the background. A vehicle was making frequent trips to the gate. We could see ammunition boxes being unloaded.

Record thin presence at Ekushey book fair

AMENA KHATUN

Only one entrance was open to the visitors while two others were locked at the Amar Ekushey Boli Mela which is very unlikely scene for the fair in comparison with any other day as most booklovers did not dare visit the fair.

No new titles were unveiled at the Nazrul Mancha, information centre was empty and no visitors were on the seat to enjoy the cultural programme on the makeshift stage on the academy premises.

It was an unfamiliar scene at the fair venue yesterday as Amar Ekushey Boli Mela witnessed the smallest crowds of its history following the gunfights between rebel BDR members and army men at the BDR headquarters at Pikhana. Around 60 stalls were kept shut down till evening.

Panic gripped the visitors, readers and publishers and the surrounding areas of the academy were seen almost empty.

"At least three hours have past but no visitors have come to our stall yet to buy or browse books, while on the other days minimum hundred people crowd the place during these hours," said Mustakim, a bookseller of Spandan Publication.

Murshid Anwar, deputy director of public relations department at the academy, told journalists, "Hearing the news of gunfights at Pikhana, the authorities decided to lock the two other entrances to visitors to ensure their safety as one stray bullet fell in front of one gate at the early noon."

"Besides, a panic situation was prevailing among the publishers following the incident as many of them delayed to the fair," he added.

Athoi, a student of Holy Cross College, who arrived at the fair along with her brother, returned home from the fair buying a couple of books by Anisul Hoque titled 'Ma' and 'Shey'.

"My mother forbade me to visit the fair today, but I had to come as these are the last days of the fair," she said with a bit thrill in her voice for venturing to come in such a day of pandemonium.

"No crowds and no hawkers are there to our annoyance. So, I can easily move from one stall to another to browse my desired books today which would be more impossible on other days as the fair draws huge crowds," said Athoi who came to buy some books for her husband's birthday.

The new books published last week include 'Bitter Opore Jhumka Phul' a recitation collection by Kamrul Hasan Manju, 'Ichche Purno' by Mahmuda Selina, 'Ot'it Diner Smriti' by Sanjeda Khatun, 'Jagrata Bangladesh' by Ahmed Safa, 'Prakity Mangal' by Dijen Sharma and 'Palashi Theke Dhanamond' by Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury.

Obituary

METRO DESK



Zeba Khondker, a teacher of Sunnydale, Dhaka and wife of Prof Moniruzzaman Khondker, Department of Botany of Dhaka University, passed away on Sunday at the age of 56, says a press release.

She left behind her husband, son, daughter, and a host of relatives to mourn her death.

Her kulkhwani will be held after Asr prayers tomorrow at her residence (D-3, Tower Bhaban, Fuller Road, Dhaka University) in the city.

APPOINTMENT OF 10 JUDGES

HC verdict self-contradictory Says Adv TH Khan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Advocate TH Khan yesterday told the Supreme Court (SC) that the High Court (HC) judgement on the appointment of 10 unconfirmed HC judges is self-contradictory and the leave to appeal against this verdict should be granted.

He said this while presenting arguments during a hearing at the SC full bench on behalf of 29 sitting HC judges who filed the leave to appeal against the HC verdict directing the government to reappoint 10 unconfirmed judges with seniority.

Advocate TH Khan said the three-member special bench

of the HC in its verdict said the process of reappointment of the unconfirmed judges have to be completed by the authorities within one month of receiving the certified copy of the verdict and, at the same time, it observed that the judges do not need to take oath after their appointment.

As per Article 148 of the Constitution, the additional judges of the High Court have to take oath after their appointment and before starting their function, he added.

The five-member SC full bench headed by Chief Justice MM Ruhul Amin adjourned the hearing till today.

DHAKA TODAY

Discussion
Health 21 and The Daily Star jointly organise a discussion on 'Operationalisation of the community clinics'. Venue: Daily Star seminar room. Time: 10:00am.

US Trade show
The opening ceremony of the US Trade Show 2009 will be held. Venue: Sheraton Hotel. Time: 10:00am. American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh organises the show.

Computer fair
The opening ceremony of the City IT 2009 Computer Fair will be held. Venue: IDB Bhaban. Time: 11:30am. BCS Computer City arranges the fair.

Publication ceremony
The launching ceremony of a World Bank publication titled 'HIV and AIDS in South Asia: An economic development risk' will be held. Venue: Sonargaon Hotel. Time: 4:00pm.

WEATHER TODAY

Dry weather likely

UNB, Dhaka

Weather is likely to remain mainly dry with partly cloudy sky over the country in the next 12 hours as of 6:00pm today.

Rain or thundershowers accompanied by temporary gusty wind may occur at one or two places over Rajshahi and Sylhet divisions and the regions of Tangail and Mymensingh.

Night temperature may remain nearly unchanged over the country, Met Office said.

Highest temperature 35.2 degrees Celsius was recorded yesterday at Jessore and lowest 16.2 degrees Celsius at Rajshahi.

The sun sets in the capital at 6:00pm today and rises at 6:22am tomorrow.

Highest and lowest temperature and humidity recorded in some major cities and towns yesterday were:

City/Town	Temperature in Celsius		Humidity in percentage	
	Max	Min	Morning	Evening
Dhaka	33.3	23.2	77	37
Chittagong	28.0	17.6	75	82
Rajshahi	33.8	16.2	99	41
Khulna	33.7	24.5	99	58
Barisal	32.5	24.0	92	72
Sylhet	31.8	24.0	92	80
Cox's Bazar	30.1	21.5	75	81