

May Day today

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workers at Hay Market in Chicago, USA, who demanded that the 12-hour workday be reduced to eight hours.

Today is a public holiday. Apart from government, different trade and labour unions, human rights organisations, professional bodies, socio-cultural bodies and political parties will observe the day in a befitting manner by holding rallies, seminars, discussions and cultural programmes in the capital and elsewhere in the country.

The state-run Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar and private television channels will air special programmes on the day while the national dailies are bringing out special supplements on the occasion.

The Prime Minister (PM) Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate a three-day programme, organised by labour and employment ministry, at Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the city today to mark the day.

President Zillur Rahman and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition in parliament Khaleda Zia gave separate messages on the occasion.

In his message, President Zillur Rahman hoped that the spirit of the May Day would further expedite the efforts of ensuring welfare and progress of the people and the country.

"Contribution of toiling masses is indispensable for the socio-economic development of the country," he said adding combined efforts of all are imperative for building a prosperous and strong economy.

The President called for training of workers, increasing facilities and strengthening owner-worker amicable relations for production of goods and enhancing the quality of product.

Sheikh Hasina in her message stressed the need for combined efforts and cooperation of all by ensuring the just rights of workers to take ahead the country's development activities speedily.

For this, she also emphasised on corruption-free environment in all sectors, unity and good relationship between owners and workers as well as innovation of modern technology and successful implementation of improved management.

She reiterated her government pledges on the eve of the May Day for building up a digital Bangladesh by 2021 through innovating and utilising appropriate technology as well as providing fair wages, generating employment, eliminating child labour, empowering women, ensuring occupational safety and health and creating skilled manpower.

Pointing out various steps taken for protecting the inter-

est of workers during her regime, Opposition Leader and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in her message said "Our efforts aimed at improving workers' condition is not over and will continue in the days ahead," she said.

The Prime Minister will address a public meeting organised by Jatiya Sramik League in Paltan Maidan in the city today while main opposition party BNP will hold a rally there tomorrow afternoon where the BNP chief will address.

Workers Party of Bangladesh President Rashed Khan Menon and General Secretary Bimol Biswas, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) President Manzurul Ahsan Khan and General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim in separate messages also greeted the working class people.

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD), Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), Dhaka Sub-editors Council, Bangladesh Gonosanghati Andolan, Sramik Karmachari Oikya Parishad (Skop), Bangladesh Apparels Workers Federation (BAWF), OSHE Foundation, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Jatiya Sramik Jote, Jatiya Garment Workers Federation, Garment Sramik Oikya Forum, Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha, Committee for Protection of Jute and Jute Industry, Khulna, Garment Pioneer Foundation, Anti Imperialist Democratic Unity (AIDU), Bangladesh Garment and Shilpa Sramik Federation, Bangladesh Trade Union Federation, Jatiya Sramik Federation Bangladesh, Jago Bangladesh Garment Sramik Federation, Bangladesh Biplobi Garment Sramik Federation, Bangladesh Trade Union Centre (BTUC), Bangladesh Jatiya Garment Sramik Karmachari League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Sramik Jote, Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Mukti Andolan, Bangladesh Sangjukta Sramik Federation, Awaj Foundation, Textile Garment Workers Federation, Shadin Bangla Garments Sramik Karmachari Federation, Dhaka Sawmills Workers Union, Bangladesh Bhashman Sramik Union, Bangladesh Islami Oikya Jote and Hazaribagh Tannery Workers Union will hold discussions, solidarity rallies and form human chains in different parts of the capital today.

Mexico urges

FROM PAGE 16
The steps were aimed at stopping further spread of the virus, blamed for 168 deaths in Mexico and one in the United States.

"There is no safer place to protect yourself against catching swine flu than in your house," Mexican President Felipe Calderon said in a televised address Wednesday night. He praised the "heroic work" of doctors and nurses and brushed aside criticism that his government's response was slow.

In the US, where swine flu has been confirmed in 11 states, both Vice President Joe Biden and the acting head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in televised interviews Thursday there would be no practical benefit to closing the US-Mexican border. Biden said on CBS that it would be a "monumental undertaking" with far-reaching consequences.

Biden also said on NBC's "Today" show that he is advising his own family to stay off commercial airlines and even subways because of swine flu. If one person sneezes on a confined aircraft, he said, "it goes all the way through the aircraft." His precautions go beyond official advice from the US government.

The WHO on Wednesday raised its alert level to Phase 5, the second-highest, indicating a pandemic may be imminent.

"It really is all of humanity that is under threat during a pandemic," WHO Director General Margaret Chan said in Geneva. "We do not have all the answers right now, but we will get them."

Switzerland and the Netherlands became the latest countries to report swine flu infections. In addition to Mexico and the US, Canada, New Zealand, Britain, Germany, Spain, Israel and Austria have confirmed cases.

The Swiss government said a 19-year-old student with swine flu was mistakenly released from the hospital and then hastily readmitted. The Dutch said a 3-year-old child who recently returned from Mexico had contracted swine flu and was being treated and recovering well.

European Union health ministers planned emergency talks in Luxembourg to coordinate national efforts in preventing the spread of swine flu in Europe.

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The outbreak appeared to already be stabilising in Mexico, the epicentre. Confirmed swine flu cases doubled Wednesday to 99, but new deaths finally seemed to be levelling off after an aggressive public health campaign was launched when the epidemic was declared April 23.

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have sickened as many as 2,955 people across the country, though hospital records suggest the outbreak may have peaked here last week.

Calderon said authorities would use the partial shutdown to weigh whether to extend the emergency measures, or "if it is possible to phase out some" restrictions.

The WHO said the global threat was serious enough to ramp up efforts to produce a vaccine against the virus. It declared a Phase 5 outbreak for the first time. In the US, the CDC and state officials have confirmed cases in New York, Texas, California, Maine, Kansas, Massachusetts, Indiana, Ohio, Arizona, Nevada and Michigan. Eight states closed schools Wednesday, affecting 130,000 students in Texas alone.

Obama said his administration has made sure that needed medical supplies are on hand and he praised the Bush administration for stockpiling 50 million doses of antiviral medications.

"The key now is to just make sure we are maintaining great vigilance, that everybody responds appropriately when cases do come up. And individual families start taking very sensible precautions that can make a huge difference," he said.

Ecuador, Cuba and Argentina have all banned travel to or from Mexico, and Peru has banned inbound flights. The Panama Canal Authority ordered pilots and other employees who board ships passing through the waterway to use surgical masks and gloves.

The US, the European Union and other countries have discouraged nonessential travel to Mexico. Some countries have urged their citizens to avoid the United States and Canada as well. Health officials said such bans would do little to stop the virus.

In France, President Nicolas Sarkozy met with Cabinet ministers to discuss swine flu, and the health minister said France would ask the European Union to suspend flights to Mexico.

Medical detectives have not pinpointed where the outbreak began. Scientists believe that somewhere in the world, months or even a year ago, a pig virus jumped to a human and mutated, and has been spreading between humans ever since.

China has gone on a rhetorical offensive to squash any suggestion it's the source of the swine flu after some Mexican officials were quoted in media reports in the past week saying the virus came from Asia and the governor of Mexico's Veracruz state was quoted as saying the virus specifically came from China.

By March 9, the first symptoms were showing up in the Mexican state of Veracruz, where pig farming is a key industry in mountain hamlets and where small clinics provide the only health care.

The earliest confirmed case was there: a 5-year-old boy who was one of hundreds of people in the town of La Gloria whose flu symptoms left them struggling to breathe.

Days later, a door-to-door tax inspector was hospitalised with acute respiratory problems in the neighbouring state of Oaxaca, infecting 16 hospital workers before she became Mexico's first confirmed death.

Govt plans

FROM PAGE 1
Development Studies, said, "There is excess manpower in the government machinery. So, the government can utilise the existing manpower instead of making new recruitments."

He said the basic spirit of the government move is right but it has to be ensured that the existing manpower works properly.

The circular says, "Squeezing of government expenditure and austerity is required to ensure fund for creating employment, increasing macro demand, social security activities and different poverty alleviation activities in the backdrop of the world economic recession."

The circular has 18 points as austerity guidelines, of which many are now being followed and directives are there to continue those.

Development projects will have to be manned, as far as possible, on deputation by staff under revenue budget.

Fuel costs for vehicles of completed projects shall not be met from the revenue sector while government organisations cannot use cars above 1600CC or jeeps above 2700CC.

Excess expenditures on entertainment for government meetings and seminars have to be avoided. No gates or arches can be constructed for VIPs.

Proshika staff

FROM PAGE 16
that Faruque compelled some staffs to do politics and embezzled funds while allocating loans to his cronies.

They also raised a 19-point demand before the government that includes withdrawal of the dismissal order against its 10 senior officials and cancellation of 25 percent cut from their salaries.

In Khulna, divisional coordinator of Proshika, Mohammad Shahadat Hossain at a press conference demanded removal of Faruque and his corrupt associates.

Several hundred officials and staffs from different districts units of the organisation took part in the press conference, held at Khulna Press Club.

Shahadat urged the government to conduct an investigation into the corruptions alleged that Faruque and his associates.

In Dinajpur, some employees of the NGO also formed a human chain at district head quarters and pressed the same demand. They also submitted separate memorandums to the deputy commissioner and UNO of the Upazila headquarters.

In the memorandums, they alleged that Faruque used Proshika for his personal gains.

Proshika officials from Gopalganj and Madaripur also staged demonstrations demanding removal of its chief Qazi Faruque.

25,000 primary

FROM PAGE 16
the use of technology in the country's education sector to produce skilled human resources for overall development of the society.

The country's world-class education must be ensured at the level of higher education and DU has to play the pioneer role.

"We need change. We are still stuck in a vicious circle even after 38 years of independence. We have to bring changes in our mindset to change the society," the education minister said.

Dhaka University Vice Chancellor AAMS Arefin Siddique said access to technologies should be made available to children from school levels to face the upcoming global challenges.

DU Engineering and Technology Faculty Dean Shahida Rafique presented the keynote paper at the seminar.

DU former Pro-VC AFM Yusuf Haider, Shikha Andolan Mancha President Prof Ajay Roy and eminent educationists and journalists attended the seminar with DUJA President Shahjahan Shuvo in the chair.

DUJA General Secretary Riadul Karim moderated the seminar.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 16
Our reply

No person or authority has the right to catch any wildlife without valid licence. Under the Bangladesh Wildlife Act, 1974, this is a punishable offence. Moreover, zoo is not the authority to receive any wildlife caught from the wild. Anybody licensed to catch wildlife is supposed to hand them over to the forest department. Moreover, 'damage' of coconuts cannot be a ground to catch the squirrels. The picture clearly showed many of them were badly bruised.

10pc cut

FROM PAGE 1
During this period of last fiscal year, the expenditure was Tk 9,480 crore, 36 percent of the original ADP of that year.

After the meeting, Planning Minister AK Khandaker said during the remaining months of this fiscal year they would be able to implement up to 90 percent of the revised ADP.

However, many secretaries during the NEC meeting said they were given more allocation than they could spend. Some others complained about getting inadequate allocation.

The planning minister told journalists that ministries were asked to inform the planning ministry if they have received over or under allocations by next week. He said the ADP might be tweaked after receiving the reports.

Economists often say that for better utilisation the number of projects in the ADP should be kept to a minimum. In the revised ADP the allocation was cut but the number of projects increased.

In the original ADP the number of projects was 904 and in the revised ADP the number rose to 1,036.

Apart from these, a list of 350 unapproved projects was kept and a number of these, if not all, may get approval and ADP funding.

Huge interests

FROM PAGE 16
confident that Pakistan was serious about fighting Islamic militants and that its nuclear weapons were secure.

But Obama said that the civilian government of President Asif Ali Zardari, who is due in Washington next week, was unable to provide basic services that would ensure people's loyalty.

"I am gravely concerned about the situation in Pakistan, not because I think that they're immediately going to be overrun and the Taliban would take over in Pakistan," Obama said.

"I'm more concerned that the civilian government there right now is very fragile," he said.

"We want to respect their sovereignty, but we also recognise that we have huge strategic interests -- huge national security interests -- in making sure that Pakistan is stable and that you don't end up having a nuclear-armed militant state."

Pressed on whether the United States would intervene if Pakistan's nuclear arsenal were under threat, Obama said he would not respond to a hypothetical question.

Pakistan, the Islamic world's only declared nuclear weapons state, has been livid over US infringements on its sovereignty.

Obama, who has put a new focus on rooting out extremism in Pakistan and Afghanistan in his first 100 days, has continued the previous George W. Bush administration's controversial drone attacks inside Pakistan.

The unmanned attacks are said to have killed high-level members of the al-Qaeda network hidden in remote areas but they have inflamed

public opinion by killing civilians.

Pakistan has asked the United States to respect its sovereignty and allow it to hunt militants on its own, but US officials have said that elements in Pakistani intelligence tipped off militants over some previous raids.

Many US-based experts believe that elements of Pakistan's powerful military and intelligence are defying civilian leader Zardari, who took over last year from military ruler Pervez Musharraf.

But Obama said he was confident that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal was secure, "because the Pakistani army, I think, recognises the hazards of those weapons falling into the wrong hands."

He also said that Pakistan's military had just recently started to overcome its historical animosity toward India.

"You're starting to see some recognition just in the last few days that the obsession with India as the mortal threat to Pakistan has been misguided and that their biggest threat right now comes internally," Obama said.

Pakistan has fought three full-fledged wars with India since their separation at birth in 1947 on independence from Britain. The two nations both declared themselves nuclear powers in 1998.

US military commanders have repeatedly complained that Pakistan was devoting troops to the Indian border that could be used to fight Islamic extremists in lawless areas bordering Afghanistan.

But the United States has welcomed Pakistan's new deadly offensive in the troubled Swat valley, where the government had entered a controversial deal with militants to allow the imposition of Islamic Shariah law.

Taliban hold

FROM PAGE 16
said he was "gravely concerned" about Pakistan's stability and described its government as "very fragile" although he did express confidence that the country's nuclear arsenal was safe from militants.

Pakistan's president urged the public to support the army's offensive against Taliban fighters so that Pakistan would remain "a moderate, modern and democratic state."

Ethnic tension was the suspected spark for the gun attacks Wednesday in Karachi, a teeming southern port city with a volatile history. Much of the tension has been between the Pashtun population, who dominate the country's militant-infested northwest, and Urdu-speakers descended from migrants from India.

The latter are in large part represented by the political party that runs the city, the Muttahida Quami Movement.

The MQM has been outspoken against the Pashtun-dominated Taliban and has warned that the militants represent a growing threat in Karachi, Pakistan's commercial hub.

The city was largely crippled Wednesday after two MQM activists were gunned down by unknown shooters, sparking street violence that went on late into the night.

Paramilitary rangers roamed the city's trouble spots Thursday, as hospital doctors and police said the death toll had reached 34, with about 50 others injured.

There was concern that tensions could flare again during funerals set for later in the day.

Officials and politicians resisted blaming groups beyond criminals.

"Criminals and the mafia want to put the city's peace on the stake, but all the peaceful citizens should come up to counter such designs," MQM leader Altaf Hussain said from London, where he is in self-exile.

The rangers arrested more than 25 suspects in the shootings, said Maj. Aurang Zeb, a spokesman for the security forces. He added that educational institutions were ordered shut.

The military, meanwhile, continued with an offensive against Taliban militants in Buner, a district some 100 kilometres from Islamabad.

The army said Wednesday that it had retaken the main town in Buner and that more than 50 Taliban fighters and one member of the security forces died in the offensive. Militants were holding dozens of captured police and troops hostage.

Troops backed by jet fighters and helicopter gunships were moving toward militant

strongholds in the Ambela and Pir Baba areas, an army official said Thursday. The troops were facing resistance at Ambela and some other areas, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak to media.

Taliban fighters from the Swat Valley entered Buner earlier this month fresh off a peace deal with the government. The military launched the offensive there Tuesday under strong US pressure.

AL workers

FROM PAGE 16
AL President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia will address those rallies.

As these will be first ever public rallies of both AL and BNP after December 29 national poll they took them as challenges to stage showdowns of their political supremacy.

Dhaka city unit of BNP and AL have already held several meetings to make the programmes a success. Party insiders said some former lawmakers of both parties have been assigned to ensure huge public gatherings.

BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia herself talked to two rival leaders of BNP's city unit -- Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka and former Mayor Mirza Abbas -- in an effort to bury the hatchet and asked them to work together for the sake of the party.

Following her instruction both leaders attended a preparatory meeting on Wednesday at party's Naya Paltan office.

AL leaders said they had taken the programme seriously and are now putting their efforts on gathering at least five lakh people. Apart from lawmakers in the city the party also asked district committees adjoining the capital to attend the rally.

As per the party decision volunteers will be posted at eight places nearby Paltan Maidan to ensure discipline.

"We have already held a number of meetings with party leaders to ensure a gargantuan gathering, Roy Ramesh Chandra, general secretary of Sramik League told reporters.

At a preparatory meeting in Shahjahanpur BNP leader Mirza Abbas, Nazrul Islam Khan and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy urged the party men to make the rally a success.

"We have to prove through the grand gathering that Khaleda Zia still holds sway over the country's politics," Abbas said at the meeting.

Nazrul said the rally is the test case for BNP workers and it will prove how workers can work in the face of torture and repression by the government.

Jataytabadi Chharta Dal organised another meeting at party's central office where BNP leaders were also present.

Khaleda, sons apply

FROM PAGE 1
Razzak, Tofal Ahmed and Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, former home minister Mohammad Nasim, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu, AL lawmakers Engineer Mosharraf Hossain, Kamal Ahmed Majumder, former AL lawmaker Alhaj Mokbul Hossain and Haji Mohammad Selim and former BNP lawmaker Amanullah Aman are among the political bigwigs seeking withdrawal of the cases filed against them.

On receiving the applications, the district magistrate has sent those to the public prosecutor for his opinion on the case merit.

Talking to The Daily Star Wednesday, PP Abdullah Abu said, "I have already examined 57 cases including two against Awami League President Sheikh Hasina, and sent those back to the district magistrate."

He said the Meghnaghat power plant and BEPZA graft cases against Hasina were filed by the last BNP government to harass her politically, and so he has suggested that those be dismissed.

Officials at the district magistrate's office yesterday said they have sent 57 petitions on as many cases to the home ministry for decisions.

As of yesterday, they said, around 400 petitions have been sent to the PP's Office, while process is underway to send 639 more applications for scrutiny.

On review by the government's high-powered committee, the petitions will be sent back to the district magistrate.

After that, the PP will file petitions with the courts concerned for hearing of the cases for withdrawal, officials involved with the process said. All the applications have

been filed under section 494 of Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) that empowers the state law officer to move to have any case dismissed anytime before judgment.

The Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) says, "The public prosecutor in charge of a case may, with the consent of the court, at any time before the judgment is pronounced, withdraw from the prosecution of any person either generally or in respect of any one or more of the offences for which he is tried."

Legal experts said the same procedure will apply to disposal of the petitions filed outside the capital.

On coming to power in 2001, the BNP-led four-party alliance had 7,000 cases against 72,000 persons dismissed. Taking advantage of the move, a good number of listed criminals got off the hook.

Almost all those who managed to put themselves in the clear at that time were leaders and workers of the then ruling alliance.

CASES AGAINST HASINA
Currently, there are 11 cases against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Of those, eight were filed during the previous BNP-led alliance government and the rest during the Fakhruddin Ahmed-led caretaker government.

The eight cases filed by the BNP government include the ones dealing with graft in purchase of MIG-29s and Frigate, construction of Bangabandhu Navtheater and awarding contract for Meghnaghat Power Plant.

Of the cases filed during the last interim government, two are on graft charges and one on extortion.

On behalf of Hasina, her counsels Fazole Nur Taposh and Habibur Rahman filed the petitions on different dates last month.

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