

Power crisis

FROM PAGE 1
She said her government will fix minimum wage for labourers in line with the market price.

The premier said the present government has already formed a tripartite committee comprised of workers, owners and government representatives to ensure the rights of labourers.

Thousands of activists and leaders of the AL and its associated organisations attended the rally, the first public meeting of Hasina since she assumed the office of prime minister on January 6.

The premier sat behind a bullet-proof glass on the dais and also delivered speech from a podium walled with bullet-proof glass amid tight security.

Several central party leaders were not even allowed to go near the dais.

Processions from Dhaka and its adjoining areas marched to the Paltan Maidan shortly after 12:00 noon. Thousands of party activists and leaders carrying banners, placard and festoons reached the venue on foot as vehicular movement on all roads around Paltan Maidan was restricted.

But there was no traffic congestion on the streets in and around the area on the day as it was a public holiday.

As the Paltan Maidan got jam-packed, many had to listen to the premier's speech standing at Zero Point, Muktangan, Bangabandhu Avenue, Dainik Bangla and Rajuk Bhaban.

Referring to militancy,

Hasina said investigations show that ministers and lawmakers of the previous BNP-led alliance government patronised militants and damaged the country's image abroad.

Commenting on the seizure of 10 truckloads of firearms and ammunition, Hasina said the involvement of former BNP ministers and lawmakers in it is coming out gradually.

The premier said some undesirable incidents occurred in the four-month rule of the present government which settled those successfully one after another.

Criticising some opposition leaders for their remarks about the massacre at the BDR headquarters, she said 57 officers were killed in the incident but their (BNP) statements indicated that they would be happy if more lives were lost and a civil war had broken out in the country.

"You have to remain alert as conspiracies are still going on," Hasina said.

She sought people's cooperation to foil all 'conspiracies' and build the 'golden Bangladesh' dream by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"These days of sufferings will not last longer. We shall bring happiness to people's lives," she said.

Sramik League President Abdul Matin Master presided over the rally attended by, among others, Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and engineer Mosharraf Hossain.

Ensure power

FROM PAGE 1
Several hundred leaders, workers and supporters of BNP and its associate organisations attended the rally, apparently the first showdown since the December 29 election debacle, amid stringent security measures. They came to the venue in processions and chanted slogans against the government.

Rejecting all allegations of corruption against her and the previous BNP government, Khaleda blamed the Awami League government and the last caretaker government for the ongoing 'chaotic' situation in the country.

She threw challenges to archival Hasina, asking her to prove the Tk 20 thousand crore corruption in the power and energy sectors during BNP's rule as Hasina said at her Friday rally at Paltan Maidan.

"Corruption started during the Awami League government and it reached the highest level during the caretaker government," she said, adding that maximum irregularities have taken place during the latter's tenure.

The former prime minister claimed that corruption was reduced after BNP assumed power and success came in all sectors including investment, production and employment. "But many BNP leaders and workers have been arrested in the name of corruption and on false propaganda against BNP," she said.

During her about 50-minute speech, Khaleda bitterly criticised the last caretaker government for "destroying" the country's image and "hatching conspiracy" to render the country dysfunctional. She also criticised it for price hike of essentials and claimed that rice price was only Tk 16-17 during her rule.

Refuting Hasina's Friday claim that the previous BNP government could not generate single megawatt of electricity, Khaleda said her government added 1,280 MW of power to the national grid. She lambasted Hasina for giving false information and making confusing statements.

The BNP chairperson alleged that the government could not give people anything, in the last four months and has rather created problems in every sector.

"Politicisation is going on across the country... Even government employees can not perform their duties properly... Universities and medical colleges have closed one after another, teachers assaulted. Is this the 'digital Bangladesh'?"

Muggers

FROM PAGE 16
him by shooting.

Krishna was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) where he was undergoing treatment, police said.

Family sources at DMCH said the snatchers shot two bullets in his back as Krishna tried to resist.

Sub-Inspector Goutam Roy of Sutrapur Police Station told The Daily Star that internal conflicts among the businessmen in the area might have caused the incident.

50 injured

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as Hanu, Mintu, Samrat, Yunus, Badsha, Harun, Ripon, Durul, Habib, Mamun and Alam who are undergoing treatment at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital. Others were admitted to local clinics.

Witnesses said the clash erupted when cloth traders Salim and Sipon took jeweller Harendra Nath Kumar on physically at his shop Laxmi Jewellers over selling a gold chain.

The news prompted the jewellers to retaliate and they ransacked around 30 cloth shops and damaged furniture, clothes, electronics materials, shop board, fan and other properties.

Later, both sides chased and hurled bricks on each other and the incident left vehicle, rickshaw and passerby's movement suspended for one hour.

At least five policemen including Boalia thana Officer-in-Charge Ramzan Ali, Sub-Inspector Abdus Sattar Khan and Daily Amar Desh photo journalist Asaduzzaman Asad sustained injuries during the clash.

Later, Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and additional police forces rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Saidur Rahman Chan, president of Rajshahi Cloth Businessmen Association claimed that properties worth around one crore taka and money were looted during the attack.

"Our business will remain shut until the loss is compensated," he added.

Besides, Reaz Uddin, president of Rajshahi Gold Businessmen Association claimed that at least 30 jewellers were injured in the clash.

64 civilians

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Sri Lanka's defence ministry on Saturday rejected satellite imagery issued by the United Nations in support of allegations that security forces shelled a civilian area last month.

The defence ministry said the allegations, based on UN aerial images posted on the UNOSAT website and used on several foreign television channels, had "no scientific verification" unless there was verification on the ground.

"Conclusions drawn from the interpretations of these images have no scientific validity," the ministry said, responding to reports the military had shelled an area the government itself had designated a no-fire zone.

The pictures showed craters which were formed inside the zone between February 15 and April 19, the day before the army breached the Tigers' defences and civilians started to pour out.

"The imagery is fairly clear and shows the time, so anybody can study and compare them," the head of the mapping unit at UNOSAT, Einer Bjorge, told the Al Jazeera television network.

He said the pattern of the craters would have required air power.

Sri Lanka has consistently denied it used heavy weapons against civilian populated areas and last week announced it had ordered security forces not to use heavy calibre weapons and aerial strikes.

20 injured

FROM PAGE 1
BNP workers sat at an arbitration meeting in the morning to settle a dispute over the ownership of a shop and a piece of land in the bazar, as leaders of the two rival parties had long been at loggerheads over taking control of the land and the shop.

At one stage, activists of the two parties locked in an altercation and attacked each other.

As a team of police from Baktabali outpost rushed in and tried to calm both the feuding groups, AL activists allegedly attacked the policemen, leaving at least 20 people injured.

Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) at Fatulla Model Police Station Mir Abu Tahmid said police fired 11 blank shots to bring the situation under control.

Contingents of police have been deployed in the area as a tense situation prevailed there, he said.

Contacted, Superintendent of Police Biswas Afzal Hossain said those involved in assaulting police and damaging shops would be brought to justice.

AL activists also confined SI Shamsul Haq and constable Moteleb in their local office and beat them up, leaving them injured.

On information, Fatulla thana police rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control. Police charged baton and fired 11 blank shots to disperse the troublemakers.

Locals said Fatulla thana AL President Saifullah Badal and General Secretary Shawkat Ali are involved in extortion and other criminal activities. They are allegedly sheltered by a former AL lawmaker.

Coarse rice

FROM PAGE 1
other varieties of rice in the city markets during the period.

Within last two days, the price of polao rice went up by Tk 13-15 per kg in the city's markets.

In the city's retail markets, per kg coarse rice was sold at Tk 21-23 yesterday compared to Tk 19-21 last week while Tk 18.50-21.50 per kg in the wholesale market compared to Tk 15-18 a week back.

In Mohammadpur Krishi Market (wholesale rice market) Ekota Rice Agency manager Masud Rana said "The prices of old rice and newly harvested rice have gone up in the markets in rural areas. The polao rice that they sold for Tk 50 per kg two days back had to be sold for Tk 64 yesterday as its supply from Chapainawabganj came down drastically within last four days."

Nizamuddin, general secretary of Dhaka's biggest rice wholesale market Babubazar and Badamtali, said when the government wanted market price of rice to fall it happened so but now the price is going up as the government wants so.

He said, since the government has fixed the rate at Tk 22 per kg, the sellers also have hiked the price of new rice, which is arriving in the market but it would not be clear before about one week what the trend of rice price will be as the price in Dhaka will depend on supply.

Nizamuddin said the price of paddy increased by Tk 70-100 per maund (37.32 kg) in the rural markets over the last five days.

New paddy has started arriving in different mufassal (rural) markets. Those whose paddy are still in the croplands

are observing the market trend though farmers have expressed overall satisfaction over the price of the rice in the market, sources said.

Pius Costa, director general of food directorate, told The Daily Star that there were over 5,500 OMS dealers throughout the country. Every dealer had a target of selling 1,000 kg rice every day, six days a week but they did not get favourable response even after lowering of the price by Tk 2 per kg.

UZ chairman

FROM PAGE 16
invited to tea by the officer-in-charge (OC) of Banaripara Police Station on Friday morning.

While he entered the police station at around 10:45am, Moni -- already waiting inside the room of the OC -- threw a teacup at Faruk and ordered his cadres to beat him up.

Monirul Islam Moni, meanwhile, denied the allegation. When contacted he said he had heard that some local AL activists had engaged in an altercation with the Banaripara UZ chairman over the lease of the local ferry ghat.

Faruk has sent a written complaint to the Banaripara police. Farukul Islam, OC of the station, said that he had received a written complaint from the UZ chairman but was unable to register it as a case since registration of such a case required 'permission from higher authorities.'

The district magistrate's office has started sending the applications to the MPP for his opinion on the merit of the cases. On receiving the MPP's opinions, the district magistrate is sending those to the home ministry for the next course of actions.

FROM PAGE 1
Cantonments issued a notice asking the former prime minister to vacate the house within 15 days. The time limit expires on

A counsel for Khaleda yesterday told The Daily Star that they have already prepared the writ petition, and may submit it to the HC today.

The writ petition is based on several legal grounds, he said seeking anonymity.

The grounds include there are no provisions for cancellation of allotment of the house, no time limit of the allotment and no such condition that she cannot carry out political activities from that house, he mentioned.

Earlier on April 23, Khaleda served a legal notice on the government to withdraw or revoke within five days its notice for vacating the house.

The legal notice, served by barrister Mahbub Uddin Khokon on behalf of the BNP chief, said, "Appropriate legal action would be taken if the government does not withdraw or revoke the notice served on Begum Khaleda Zia."

It said, "Soon after the assassination of President Ziaur Rahman on May 30, 1981, pursuant to a decision of the government, a lease in perpetuity was executed between the president of Bangladesh and our client in consideration of a yearly rent for the aforesaid property in favour of our client."

The notice for vacating the house is "illegal, malafide and without jurisdiction," it stated.

Sources said the attorney general's office is making preparations to face any legal challenge against the notice served on Khaleda.

Attorney General Mahbub Alam recently said his office is examining and reviewing papers and documents relating to allotment of the house, and other legal points on the issue.

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Obama

FROM PAGE 16
because of his ties to Islamists, the US government has long held Sharif at arm's length.

But now some Obama administration officials say those ties could be useful in helping Zardari's government to confront the challenge from Taliban insurgents, the report said.

The Pakistani government ceded control of the nearby Swat valley to Islamists in February, signing a deal to allow religious hardliners to enforce Islamic law in the region in order to end a bloody two-year rebellion led by a radical cleric.

But instead of disarming as required under the deal, the Taliban instead pushed further south towards Islamabad, taking over large swathes of Lower Dir and Buner.

According to the paper, the US move reflects heightened concern in the Obama administration about the survivability of the Zardari government.

The head of the United States Central Command, General David Petraeus, has said in private meetings in Washington that the Pakistani government is increasingly vulnerable, The Times said.

No one in the administration is trying to broker an actual power-sharing agreement between Zardari and Sharif, the paper noted.

But administration officials say Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Richard Holbrooke, the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, have both urged Zardari and Sharif to look for ways to work together, The Times said.

Ground troops backed by helicopter gunships destroyed nine suicide vehicles and six vehicles of "fleeing militants," he said. Three "suicide motorcyclists" were shot dead by ground troops advancing on narrow mountain tracks, he said.

A suicide bomber blew up a booby-trapped house killing two paramilitary soldiers and wounding eight others, said Abbas, bringing the military's overall losses to 13 during the offensive.

Another suicide bomber was arrested after detonating his explosives and wounding himself, the spokesman said.

Pakistan ceded control of the nearby Swat valley in February, signing a deal to allow religious hardliners to enforce Islamic law in the region in order to end a bloody two-year rebellion led by a radical cleric.

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76 militants

FROM PAGE 16
Mohmand is one of seven lawless tribal districts in north-western Pakistan, where Taliban militants frequently attack security forces.

"The Taliban attack was launched before dawn, troops retaliated and heavy fighting continued until early this morning," the spokesman said.

Two soldiers from the paramilitary Mohmand Rifles were killed and five wounded, he said adding that 16 Taliban fighters were killed.

Another security official said three soldiers were missing after the clash, but local administration official Saeed Ahmed denied this.

Last month Pakistani troops backed by helicopter gunships killed 18 militants in a military operation in Mohmand.

The offensive was launched to force militants to flee from key heights in the area.

The rugged tribal areas have been wracked by violence since Afghanistan's Taliban regime was toppled by the 2001 US-led invasion, prompting hundreds of fighters to flood the region.

None of the deaths or details provided by the military could be immediately confirmed independently.

Abbas described "fierce fighting" in the northern area of a strategic pass that heads towards Islamabad and said that 400 "well-equipped and organised" Taliban were putting up "stiff resistance" in Buner.

Ground troops backed by helicopter gunships destroyed nine suicide vehicles and six vehicles of "fleeing militants," he said. Three "suicide motorcyclists" were shot dead by ground troops advancing on narrow mountain tracks, he said.

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Smugglers loot

FROM PAGE 16
bombs, abducting government employees and beheading four other people in Swat.

Security forces killed two militants who ambushed their patrol in the Langar area of Swat on Friday, military officials said.