

Govt mulls

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law and order situation of the region immediately," State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku told The Daily Star.

Sources in the home ministry said the state minister would direct the law enforcers to launch a combing operation in the region to capture outlawed party men and their firearms, prior to announcing the surrender process that the government is actively considering to give them a chance to lay down their firearms and return to normal life.

Earlier on August 20, Inspector General of Police Nur Mohammad and Director General of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) Hassan Mahmood Khandaker visited Kushtia and directed the law enforcers to launch a joint drive. Since then the law enforcers have been conducting a special drive in the region in which at least 16 extremists have been killed in shootouts between the law enforcers and their cohorts.

The combing operation will be launched to cut down the strength of the outlawed parties and force their armed members to give in," said a senior official of the home ministry.

The home ministry is working as to whether the outlawed party activists, if surrendered, could be brought under general mercy of the government like that of 1999 when 2,700 members of different outlawed parties surrendered with 2,100 firearms.

"This time we want to do it in such a way so that the two sides (government and the extremists) are benefited," state minister Tuku told The Daily Star on Wednesday.

He said the move could be similar to that of 1999 to improve law and order situation, by curbing criminal activities in the region.

Different sources said the outlawed party members have so far killed around 250 people in the southwest region after the Awami League-led grand alliance government assumed office. The southwest region includes Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Jhenidah, Jessore and Khulna.

Besides, 30 outlaws were also killed in the hands of the law enforcers during this period. Half of them have been killed in last 15 days, sources added.

Talking to The Daily Star at his secretariat office, the state minister said the government would go tough against the outlawed parties if they do not surrender willingly.

The outlawed parties intensify their activities in the region through killings and extortion allegedly with the backing of some ruling party leaders.

Former home minister Mohammad Nasim who initiated the process of surrender during his term told The Daily Star yesterday that there is no alternative to surrender to improve the overall law and order situation of the region.

"You can temporarily improve the law and order by capturing the extremists but you can't make it permanent," he said, observing that the decision of the then government asking the outlaws to

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surrender was a right one to establish peace in the region.

"Now the government will have to urge them to surrender alongside launching a massive combing operation. Then, the outlawed party men will become morally weak and surrender," said Nasim, also a central AL leader.

He said the government will have to initiate the process keeping long-term rehabilitation plan for the outlaws so that they do not go back to their banned party again. He observed that over 500 members of different outlawed parties, rehabilitated in Ansar Battalion on temporary basis after their surrender in 1999, have still been facing problems.

Sources said over 300 men left the battalion and returned to their previous occupations of killing, mugging and other modes of criminal acts.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, who hails from Kushtia, said the government could take the initiative and the party would provide all out assistance to this end.

Hanif, also a special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, observed that there were flaws in the surrender process initiated by the then AL government in 1999.

4 killed

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Chowdhury, a passenger of the bus, said.

The truck driver managed to flee with the truck.

The injured were admitted to Shaheed Ziaur Rahman Medical College and a local private hospital in the area.

60 BCL

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a Jubo league adherent, with ten bottles of pessidyl at Sahebganj under Kotwali Police Station Thursday night.

Tuhin was coming from Haragach by a motorbike. He was also sent to Rangpur central jail.

Meanwhile, Kaunia police arrested five activists of Jubo League and one of Sweekhchhasebok League at Teesta Railway Bridge as they beat up the bridge toll contractor Nojir Hossain for refusing to pay extortion money.

The arrestees are Abdul Motaleb, Safiqul Islam, Siddique Hossain, Nur-un-Nabi and Rabiu Islam of Jubo League and Mosharrif Hossain of Sweekhchhasebok League Kaunia upazila unit.

Kounia police sources said on information a team led by a sub-inspector rushed to Teesta Bridge and rescued Nojir from the clutches of the arrestees.

A sub-inspector of Kounia Police Station preferring anonymity said the miscreants were beating up Nojir as he denied paying Tk 10,000 as toll money.

Joint Convener of Sweekhchhasebok League of the upazila unit Jamshur Ali admitted the fact and said earlier Jubo League and Sweekhchhasebok League leaders of the upazila tried to make a negotiation with the toll contractor. However, the incident did not occur due to internal feud, he added.

Probe finds

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administration said use of leased out hill land, which is meant for rubber cultivation and orchards, by a third-party is a violation of the lease contracts.

"As I understand, sub-leasing is prohibited, but what Destiny did is kind of a profit-sharing arrangement with the lease-holders. There is no question of us owning or grabbing land in Bandarban," explained Gen Harun.

The investigation report says people of the retired army chief cut hill slopes 5km off the Ali Kadam-Thanchi road and planted saplings on jhum land owned by indigenous people.

It says during a recent visit to the spot Toifa Mouja Headman Reng Pung Mro, who was with the investigation committee, expressed his ignorance about how the retired general and his men got hold of the land there.

The probe body received allegations from locals that the mouja headman had sold out land ownership to retired army officials. Allegations of other wrongdoings were brought against the headman's staff Mojammel Haq.

Arun Das, a member of the probe body, told The Daily Star that under the patronage of Destiny Group, Mojammel grabbed land owned by indigenous people. He said UKY Rang Tripura and Malini Tripura were evicted from their homes near the Doljhuri canal.

Destiny Tree Plantation's Director (Operation) Md Farid Akhter told this correspondent at his Dhaka office on Tuesday that they did not get any land allocation from the government in Bandarban.

"We made agreements with lease holders and they rented out the land to us for commercial plantation," he said.

Farid said they have around 3,500 acres of land in Bandarban under the plantation programme. Denying having evicted anyone from their ancestral land, he said Destiny Group is rather creating jobs for the local people.

In the wake of gross irregularities centring land by Destiny Group and mounting pressures on the administration from locals against land grabbing, Bandarban DC Mizanur Rahman issued an order on August 30 banning Destiny's tree plantation there.

Gen Harun, however, told The Daily Star that the ban was applicable for the disputed Toifa mouja only—a claim the Bandarban district administration dismissed.

Earlier, Destiny said through press advertisements that a total of 5,330 acres of land is under its control by means of buying, leasing, hiring and partnership. And of this, more than 4,225 acres of land is in 22 moujas in Bandarban.

The migrant workers also believe that anomalies in manpower recruitment will end once Bangladesh receives "source country" status.

Thirteen South and Central Asian countries have been recognised as source nations from where Malaysian companies hire manpower on a regular basis through a transnational system.

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Workers and officials said agents usually send more workers to Malaysia than required under special arrangements rendering the additional workers jobless.

"Agents in both countries are bringing additional workers causing sufferings for them," Mustafizur Rahman, a small trader in Kuala Lumpur, told The Daily Star.

Mustafiz, owner of two shops, who has been living in Malaysia for 17 years, alleged that travel agents and syndicates manipulate the system and make money under the special arrangements deceiving poor workers.

RESTRICTION ON BANGLADESHI WORKERS

The Bangladesh high com-

missioner said since

any problems. They are now even in a position to bargain with the Malaysia authorities for increasing their salaries and other facilities," said Masudur Rahman, first secretary (Labour) of Bangladesh High Commission.

Mustafiz said Bangladesh government should lobby the Malaysian government for giving Bangladesh "source country" status.

Malaysia cancelled the work visas in March much to the frustration of the Bangladeshi workers, saying the country was hit by the global recession.

Malaysia hired around five lakh Bangladeshi workers from mid-2006 but irregularities in the recruitment process rendered many of them unemployed or unpaid.

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But, if any official fails to perform the duty-bound tasks, they will be punished accordingly, Tuhin warned.

The minister also urged the police officials to ensure their best performance while on duty.

Earlier, the state minister spoke as chief guest in an assembly held at Solonda Bazar in Santhia upazila of the district.

Tuhin said there is no way of the cases against Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman could be withdrawn because they have looted money from the country.

If their cases are withdrawn then it is meaningless to continue other people's trials in the country, Tuhin added.

Lawmaker of Pabna-5 constituency Golam Faruk Khandaker Prince and Pabna-4 constituency Shamsur Rahman Sharif Dilu, Pabna Police Superintendent Nibas Chandra Majhi also spoke on the occasion.

Kamruzzaman admitted the miners' unrest at the BCCML.

The BCCML sources said the agitating workers also had been obstructing the sale of coal since 1:00pm yesterday.

BCCML officials led by Managing Director Kamruzzaman held a meeting at the conference room of the company with leaders of the agitating miners Thursday night to resolve the issue. But they failed to provide any solution, sources said.

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The BCCML, a coal mining subsidiary of state owned Petrobangla, pays only Tk 4500 to 7200 to underground miners who produce 70 to 80 thousand tonnes of coal a month working eight-hour shifts.

MD Rabiul Islam, president of Barapukuria Coalmine Workers' Union, alleged that they had been trying to realise their demands since May but the authorities did not pay heed to it.

Meanwhile, at least 300 Chinese miners under China National Machinery Import and Export Corporation (CMC) have started extraction of coal from one of the coalfields during the strike.

But sources said coal extraction by only 300 Chinese miners would not sustain for long as they will need to extract from more coalfields.

He, however, could not ascertain the reason behind the strike.

Savar police said none was arrested in connection with the murder.

The BCCML sources said they have to count a loss of Tk 3 crore a day if coal production remains suspended.

Dipu Moni said both the countries have agreed to discuss and resolve all the existing issues as a "package programme."

Poor flock to city

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Bogra a few days ago along with a cousin. They want to work as rickshaw-pullers and make some money in the city as they can't find any work as day labourers or hired workers in Bogra.

Shukur told The Daily Star, "There is no work in our upazila right now. There are a few jobs as day labourers but the wages are very low and not enough to maintain my family of five."

"For around eight hours of labour on farmland as a hired worker, I earn hardly Tk 100 a day but here in this city, I can earn around Tk 500 a day. So even after paying Tk 70 to the rickshaw owner I am left with a neat income," Shukur said with a smile.

To cut the living cost in the big city, Shukur spends his nights at the rickshaw garage in Mirpur area along with fellow rickshaw pullers.

"All year round I eagerly await the two Eids. During the two Eids my income triples," said a smiling Abdul Mazid, an elderly beggar who has been making the move to the city twice a year from Mymensingh for the last five years.

"With people giving out Fitr and Zakat, I also get to eat some delicious food," says the elderly man.

Abdul Mazid, Mymensingh chose the Azimpur Graveyard area as his route as he thinks he earns more in this area than others.

"We have already taken special measures to keep the traffic situation under control during Ramadan. Already 800 traffic policemen have been deployed in different intersections of the city and a drive is ongoing to stop vehicles running without proper licences," he said.

So far 1,700 vehicles have been seized and 2,000 rickshaws fined have been under this drive, he said.

Meanwhile, DMP Joint Commissioner (traffic) Shafiqur Rahman recently told The Daily Star, "The number of vehicles in the city is much more than the accommodation capacity of the city streets. This causes the horrible traffic jams."

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