

6-hr hartal today

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armed forces personnel will be deployed additionally at different strategic points of the city, said Walid Hossain, additional deputy commissioner of DMP (Public Relations).

Despite repeated calls for withdrawing parties by different political parties and trade bodies, the committee and different political organisations called upon all to make the strike a success from 6:00am-12:00noon.

Different organisations held rallies and processions in the city yesterday in favour of the hartal.

At a rally at Muktangan yesterday, the committee demanded scrapping leases of off-shore blocks to foreign companies to explore oil and gas, cancelling the model PSC (Production Sharing Contracts) 2008.

It also demanded that to secure national interest new PSCs should be made, inviting fresh tenders to explore oil and gas and Phulbari contract be implemented.

In a statement, the committee convenor Engineer Sheikh Muhammad Shahidullah and member secretary Prof Anu Muhammad called upon the city dwellers to observe hartal spontaneously and peacefully, ignoring all kinds of propaganda.

Ambulance, emergency electricity supply, hospitals, medicine shops, fire brigade vehicles and kitchen markets will remain out of the purview of hartal, the statement said.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) urged all to refrain from observing the hartal.

In a press release yesterday, the trade body said the owners are now busy paying salary and bonus to the workers and the hartal at this time would hamper the process.

They noted that the export-oriented garment industries in the country have been badly affected by the global economic downturn and owners are still making frantic efforts to cope with the losses.

The BGMEA leaders also said that the hartal will push the country's overall economic activities, including readymade garment industry, into further uncertainty.

On Saturday, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) urged the committee to call off the hartal.

Jatiya Gonorantrik League and Bangladesh Samityabadi Dal said the hartal is not timely and logical while Bangabandhu Sangskritik Jote said the hartal is a conspiracy to cripple the economy of the country.

Meanwhile, eleven eminent citizens including Dr Khan Sarwar Murshid, Prof Serajul Islam Choudhury, Prof Muzaffer Ahmad and Justice Ghulam Rabbani in a statement urged the people to observe the

hartal.

Communist Party of Bangladesh, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal, among others, also called upon all to make the hartal a success.

HOMEMINISTER

WARNS ABOUT ANARCHY: Home Minister Sahara Khatun yesterday warned that stern action would be taken if any chaos is created in the name of hartal called for today from 6:00 am to 12:00 noon in the city.

"No anarchy will be tolerated in the name of hartal," said the home minister urging the National Committee to Protect Oil, Gas, Mineral Resources, Power and Ports to withdraw the hartal for the sake of the people.

Briefing newsmen after a meeting on law and order ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr and Durga Puja at her ministry, she also urged the committee to sit for a dialogue with the government to settle their demand through discussions.

Terming the hartal as 'completely unnecessary,' she said enforcing the hartal is not a right decision ahead of Eid as it would increase public sufferings.

Sahara said transport leaders and shop owners association told them that they do not accept the hartal and announced that they will keep their shops and markets open and run their vehicles on the roads during the hartal period.

She however said the government would not put pressure if anyone keeps his shop closed or chooses not to run vehicles responding to the hartal call.

The home minister said the law enforcement agencies have been directed to take tough action if anyone disrupts public security and creates anarchy in the name of hartal.

Claiming that the law and order situation is 'good,' she said the law enforcers have been trying their best to keep the situation stable.

Briefing journalists, home secretary Abdus Sobhan Sikder said the home ministry would take special measures to ensure security of people during the upcoming Eid and Puja from September 20 to 29.

He said a total of 30,282 policemen, 3,200 members from Rab, 130,000 members from Ansar battalion, 18 teams of detective branch of police and 14 teams of women police would work to ensure security across the country during the period besides regular deployment of the law enforcement agencies.

The home secretary said leave of police has been cancelled during the period and added that additional police forces would be deployed in the capital during the hartal hours to maintain law and order.

He said this year a total of 21,913 puja mandaps (worship pavilions), including 178 in Dhaka and 198 in the Chittagong, would be set up across the country.

US won't channel aid to Pakistan through govt sector

ANI, Washington

The United States has made it clear that it would not funnel its aid to Pakistan through the government sector unless it is convinced that the funds would be used effectively and efficiently and exactly for the purpose it is meant for.

"The United States would not channel all its aid through the government sector and that even when it agreed to support specific government programmes, it would do so only if it's convinced that those programmes were ready to use the funds 'effectively and efficiently,'" a senior US official said.

Talking to media person after holding talks with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and Finance Minister Tarin and other officials, Deputy Secretary of State for Management and Resources Jacob J. Lew said Washington has made its stand clear on the issue.

"They were 'very much anxious' to have as much of the assistance as possible to flow directly into the government sector. We made clear that we're looking at a variety of approaches," Lew said.

Lew urged Pakistan to take 'some very hard steps' to reform its electric utility sector in order to overcome the huge energy crisis facing the country.

Lew highlighted that US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke, during his recent Islamabad trip, had also warned Pakistan to take the issue seriously.

"We raised also the fact that it's not just a question of assistance on projects, but that Pakistan had to take some very hard steps to reform its electric utility sector in order for there to be the real opportunity for sustainable progress," The Dawn quoted Lew, as saying.

The US, he said, would support various programmes prepared by Pakistani Ministries but only 'where the programmes are ready to accept that support effectively'.

"It wouldn't be a one-size-fits-all approach. The key to us was that for each of the undertakings that we agreed upon, there had to be things that were mutually attractive from the point of view of the Pakistani government and the US government," Lew added.

The issue of the internally displaced people (IDP) was also discussed during the meeting, with the US assuring all assistance to Pakistan to help the displaced persons return home and restart their life.

2 top officials'

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while Karim on September 25.

An official notification issued by the Ministry of Establishment yesterday read the tenures of the contractual jobs of the two officers will come into effect with their joining the posts anew.

Meanwhile, senior secretaries have expressed their deep dismay over these contractual appointments of Aziz and Karim as several senior officials including senior most Secretary (OSD) Zafar Ahmed Chowdhury will be deprived of promotion to the topmost posts in the civil administration.

Highly placed sources in the government told The Daily Star that the government had no alternative but to appoint Aziz and Karim on contract as there were no such trusted persons among the seniors whom the government could promote to the two posts.

They said that the government was in serious confusion over appointments to the two posts and the ruling Awami League had a series of policy level discussions in last few days.

Finally the policymakers gave opinion in favour of contract to the incumbent cabinet and principal secretaries considering overall aspects and future consequences.

A top ranking bureaucrat on condition of anonymity said government's trusted persons in the administration are very much junior in the service and there might be serious rancour in the civil administration if the junior officers were elevated to the posts by superseding some 20 senior officers.

He thinks that the government has taken the correct decision in the greater interest of the civil administration.

BDR now seeks

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issue and convened an inter-ministerial meeting.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed yesterday officially announced the SC's opinion to journalists.

He said, "Although the Supreme Court has given opinion against holding trial of BDR mutiny under the army act, it has given some guidelines in this regard. We'll discuss the matter at an inter-ministerial meeting on Monday [today] to decide how the trial of the offenders can be completed expeditiously."

Since the mutiny took place at the BDR headquarters in Pikhana that killed 74 people including 57 army officers, probes by a national probe committee and the army, and BDR itself suggested holding the trial under the Army Act, 1952.

The BDR letter mainly focuses on the thrust of the force for holding a speedy trial which will help the BDR reorganise its force quickly, taking the rest of the personnel in confidence, says the source.

Citing contents of the letter the source adds after the SC's

opinion there are now scopes to try the mutineers under the penal code and BDR Act, but the BDR Act only can try those who are accused only of mutiny.

But there are some other offences such as murder, attempt to murder, loot and arson, which would not be possible to try under the BDR Act. So the penal code would be applied to try those who are accused of such offences, the source argues.

"We emphasised speedy trial under whichever law it is," says a BDR official.

He adds: "The BDR Act is also a very old one; it needs some amendments about procedural matters, which also have been suggested in yesterday's letter."

The letter also focuses on the trial process of those personnel who committed offences of mutiny outside the capital.

Meanwhile, the law minister yesterday told reporters at his secretariat office the government will hold the trial of the offenders under such a law that it is completed within a very short time and in an acceptable manner.

Swine flu

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swine flu and she died Monday last, said Mushtaq Husain.

At a press briefing at IEDCR he also said according to their epidemiological analysis, around 50,000 people in the capital have so far been infected with swine flu.

"But most of them are cured already as they had been suffering from mild illness," he said adding, in almost 98 per cent cases, patients get well without any help of anti-viral drugs.

Only five to ten persons out of 10,000 infected might need anti-viral drugs, he said.

"The trend of swine flu in Dhaka is downward but the number of infected is increasing outside the capital," experts said stressing the need to strengthen awareness campaign across the country.

LACK OF COORDINATION
Lack of coordination among different government bodies in managing, reporting, testing and keeping records of the swine flu cases leads people to a confusing state.

The IEDCR yesterday confirmed that Nasreen Khanam of Gopalganj who died on Wednesday was not a swine flu case.

"After collecting her throat swab and testing in the laboratory we are now sure that she had seasonal flu," said Mushtaq Husain.

IEDCR confirmed three swine flu deaths till date. But they are yet to confirm the reason behind the death of Sobhan alias Sagor, 20, who died at DMCH on September 4, and Fahima who died in the early hours of Saturday.

When asked if the sample could be collected from Nasreen and tested at the IEDCR even after her death, then why the samples from Sagor and Fahima could not be tested, Dr Mushtaq said they

did not get any samples of these patients from the hospitals.

"As we did not get the sample from the hospitals, we could not confirm through laboratory testing whether those patients were swine flu infected," said Dr Mushtaq.

He added, they even didn't know how many patients were receiving treatment in the isolated units of different hospitals and how many of them were getting well.

"As all the hospitals are not sending us reports timely, we don't know the exact figure of the patients undergoing treatments in different city hospitals," he added.

Even it is not clear how the sample of the cancer patient who was not registered with the swine flu unit reached IEDCR and how she continued treatment at another department after being confirmed as having swine flu on last Sunday.

Resident Physician of DMCH Dr Golam Kibria said they had not known anything about her sample testing as she was not registered with their ward.

He also said soon after Sagor's death they contacted IEDCR but nobody came to collect his sample.

Dr Mahmudur Rahman, director of IEDCR, however said he was not immediately contacted and sample is needed to be collected within an hour of death.

"Moreover testing sample from the dead body is not our priority," he added.

Even though the government has been repeatedly telling of availability of anti-viral drugs and treatment facilities at 95 Urban Primary Health Care Centres, most of them have not received the drugs yet and can provide only symptomatic treatment to the patients, this correspondent found.

Khaleda's house

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filed by Khaleda Zia, issued a rule upon the government to explain why the notice should not be declared illegal.

The HC also stayed for three months the government's third notice, and the same court, on August 23, extended for four months the stay order.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam recently told The Daily Star that they would not move to the Supreme Court (SC) to stay the High Court order for a temporary period, but place arguments and submissions verbally and in black and white before the court, turning down the legal points made in the writ petition filed by Khaleda Zia.

"We will fight for obtaining final verdict from the High Court in favour of the government," he said.

He said his office would prepare the reply of the High Court rule, stating that Khaleda Zia has been illegally occupying the cantonment residence and there is no precedence in the world where a civilian, like Khaleda Zia, can occupy any property earmarked for the army officials.

Those persons, who had showed excessive loyalty to Khaleda Zia and allocated the cantonment house to her by abusing the state powers, should be tried and punished, he said.

The attorney general said if the residence is not recovered from the 'illegal possession,' the property will go to the real estate businessmen in future.

"We will move to the High Court to vacate its order staying the notice to Khaleda Zia, after completing the hearings on the president's reference for Supreme Court opinion on the trial mode of BDR mutiny, appeals in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman assassination case and the fifth-amendment case," he said.

Mahbubey Alam said he is confident enough to prove the legality of the government notice, as there are so many legal grounds in favour of issuing it.

He also pointed out that Khaleda Zia has not made any reply to the government's show cause notice.

On May 7, the government issued a notice asking Khaleda Zia to show cause within 15 days as to why she should not be directed to return the estate, including the cantonment house.

2 outlaws killed

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Police recovered a shutter gun and eight bullets from the scene.

Marfat was accused in six cases including murder and abduction filed with Kushtia sadar and Islamic University police stations.

Another police team led by Assistant Police Super Alamgir Hossain raided Chadgara Eidgah on information that a gang of Gono Mukti Foj operatives were holding a meeting at around 5:00am.

Sensing police presence, armed cadres led by Biplob started shooting at police, forcing the law enforcers to fire back. When outlaws fled the scene, Biplob was found dead.

Police recovered two LGs and nine bullets from the spot. Biplob was accused in a dozen cases including five for murder filed with the sadar police station.

According to police, Biplob recently threatened a police official in the district with death.

Thugs snatch

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Rab-4 official sources said, a team of Rab, acting on a tip-off, went to Nam Garden in Mirpur Section-10 at around 2:00pm to nab the associates of listed criminal Shahar Ali.

Shahar was earlier killed in a gunfight with Rab on Saturday in Mirpur.

The criminals hit Major Sarwar on the head after he caught one of their accomplices during the raid.

Later, the criminals sped away by a microbus with their cohort, Rab officials said.

Commander SM Abul Kalam Azad, director of legal and media wing of Rab, told The Daily Star, "Criminals beat up the major with an iron rod and later fled the scene leaving him severely injured."

50 Taliban

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In other unrest, the defence ministry said five ANA soldiers were killed in clashes and mine blasts in southeastern Ghanzi province.

Eleven more militants were killed by foreign and local forces in northern Kunduz province, the defence ministry said in a statement, while in western Herat, two Taliban and one policeman died in clashes, a police chief said.

During other fighting in eastern Pakitika province, four militants were killed, the defence ministry said.

The attacks come as Afghanistan faces its worst violence in the eight-year war following the ouster of the hardline Taliban regime in late 2001, and amid political turmoil following fraud-tainted presidential elections last month.

Merkel faces rival in crucial German TV debate

AFP, Berlin

Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier were poised to battle it out yesterday in a TV debate seen as the latter's last chance to close the gap on the German chancellor two weeks before elections.

In Germany's fourth ever TV election debate, the pair were due to spar for 90 minutes from 8:30 pm (1830 GMT), being grilled by four prominent journalists on a wide range of topics, including the economic crisis and the war in Afghanistan.

And with the clock ticking before Germany goes to the polls on September 27, the "TV duel" as it is dubbed here is viewed as the last opportunity to ignite an election campaign that has largely failed to inspire the public.

The stakes are high: some 20 million Germans -- around one third of voters -- were expected to tune in, and 56 percent said in a recent survey the debate could have some influence on where they put their cross on election day.

Steinmeier, vice-chancellor and foreign minister in Germany's uneasy grand coalition, still has a vast amount of ground to close, with recent polls putting his Social Democrats around 13 points behind Merkel's conservatives.

Analysts say Merkel is almost certain to win a second term in power and Steinmeier is fighting to keep his party in government.

"This evening is all or nothing for Steinmeier. If he doesn't start to launch his fightback in the TV studio ... then he's failed," the mass-circulation Bild am Sonntag said in an editorial.

The paper cited a poll showing that 40 percent of the electorate is still undecided, meaning Steinmeier has plenty to play for.

However, those looking for fireworks between the two might be disappointed.

Both politicians are cautious and understated by nature and find it difficult to attack each other's record as they have been coalition partners for the past four years.

And both have played down expectations that the gloves will finally come off on Sunday, with Steinmeier saying: "The TV duel is not

about our fighting styles."

The cosy nature of the debate has infuriated Guido Westerwelle, leader of Merkel's preferred coalition partner, the liberal Free Democrats.

Calling his own exclusion from the debate "unacceptable, undemocratic and unfair", Westerwelle said it would likely come across as a "televized cabinet meeting".

"Mrs. Merkel is going to say: 'Frank-Walter, it hasn't been all that bad' and Frank-Walter will reply: 'Angela, you're right,'" he told the Handelsblatt business daily.

Claus Leggewie from the Institute for Advanced Study in the Humanities in the western city of Essen also warned that few sparks were likely to fly.

"Here come two people from the same government to tell us how it all went - not very exciting," he told the WAZ daily.

Media expert Hans-Hermann Tiedje said people would tune in "out of pure desperation".

"I would rather go and see Knut. That would be more informative," he told the Tagesspiegel daily, referring to the Berlin zoo polar bear cub who shot to global fame in 2007.

Polls after the debate before the last election in 2005 showed then incumbent Gerhard Schroeder -- dubbed the "media chancellor" for his telegenic style -- trounced Merkel but failed to gain a boost as she beat expectations.

But after four years of seeing their assured chancellor impressing on the world stage, expectations are higher this time around for Merkel's performance.

Nearly two-thirds of Germans (64 percent) believe Merkel will "win" Sunday's debate, compared to only 15 percent who think Steinmeier will triumph, according to a poll for ARD public television.

Germans turned off by their insipid election campaign at least have a choice in the round shape of Homer Simpson.

While the debate is being carried live on four major channels, a rival station is showing "The Simpsons - The Movie", and has plastered Berlin with ads saying "Vote Simpsons".

30,000 trees

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said about five lakh Jhau trees were planted on 700 acres of sandy beach on a stretch of about 10 kilometres from Shahparir Dwip in Sabrang Union of the upazila to Baharchhara in 1995 to save life and properties of the people living in the Teknaf coast.

In the course of long 14 years, the trees became big and formed a dense forest. Lakhs of Jhau trees act as wall to save the coast during tidal surges or cyclones. But for the last few months these trees are being felled.

A group of journalists during a spot visit at 11:00am on Saturday found that hundreds of trees from the government tamarisk tree garden at Khurer Mukh area under Sabrang Union were being cut and taken away in broad day light by some local people and no one was obstructing them, not even anybody from the forest department.

Amir Hossain, 45, a resident of Khurer Mukh area, said they have to pay Tk 100 to the forest workers against each tree. The bigger part of the money goes to the higher authorities through Teknaf Range Officer. He said he gets Tk 500 to 600 by selling a piece of tree.

Teknaf Coast Forest Range Officer Golam Mostafa denied the allegation of taking bribe. "We cannot protect the tamarisk garden due to lack of manpower. If a case is filed, the police don't catch the tree thieves. Now it has become risky for us to keep guard on the forest," he said.

Teknaf Police Station Officer-in-Charge (OC) Jalal Ahmed Chowdhury also denied the allegation against police. "Whenever the forest department wants our cooperation, we extend our hands. When the tamarisk gardens are destroyed, the forest department remains silent," the OC added.

After seeing the situation on Saturday, the journalists

informed Teknaf Upazila Parishad Chairman Md Shafique Miah, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) AMM Nazim Uddin and other officials concerned of this over cell phone. The upazila chairman and UNO along with the members of Rab, police and BDR then rushed to the spot.

At around 12:30pm, the law enforcers started drives to recover the felled trees.

Sources concerned said Rab members led by Rab Teknaf Region in-charge Lutfur Reza recovered around 2,000 Jhau trees from a shrimp enclosure of Abdullah and the houses and ponds of Ashraf Ali, Abdul Amin, Iman Ali, Md Yunus and Mohammad Hossain.

Hamid Hossain, 32, son of late Hasan Ali of Katabunia village, was arrested during the raid.

Police and BDR also recovered 5,000 trees from the house, pond and canals of several villages near to the beach. However, no one could be arrested in this connection.

UNO Nazim Uddin said about 7,000 trees have been recovered during raids in several villages until yesterday evening.

He alleged that eviction drive could not be conducted against the accused due to non-cooperation of the forest department. He said it is the responsibility of the forest department to file case against the persons from whose houses the trees have been seized.

Upazila Chairman Shafique Miah said about 20,000 trees have been felled only from the Jhau garden adjacent to Katabunia village in last few days. Earlier, 20,000 to 30,000 Jhau trees were also cut stolen from the garden.

Local people said the felled trees are smuggled to Cox's Bazar by trawlers. A piece of Jhau tree is sold between Tk 500 and Tk 1,200.

Law secy says sorry

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disposed of following the law secretary's submission.

State Minister for Law Quamrul Islam, committee members Fazle Rabbi Mia and Nurul Islam Sujan were present at the briefing at the parliament's media centre.

Committee sources said the law secretary came under fire at the meeting for his involvement in the incident.

A number of committee members said the prime minister was misguided in preparing the order for sending the judges into retirement and later her name was misused to defend the decision.

A day after the parliamentary body decided to investigate the role of the premier's adviser and the two secretaries, HT Imam claimed at a press conference that the judges were sent into retirement on orders of the prime minister and that it was lawful.

"We are surprised to see how HT Imam misguided Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina," committee member and BNP lawmaker Salauddin Quader Chowdhury told The Daily Star after the meeting.

He said the prime minister goes through every page of a document. "I think Imam misguided her in a surreptitious way."

Examining the documents on the issue, the parliamentary committee concluded that sending the two judges into retirement without following due legal procedure was unconstitutional.

"It was done with a mala fide intention," committee member Fazle Rabbi told The Daily Star after the meeting, referring to the long-standing conflict between the law secretary and Bangladesh Judicial

Service Association.

The law secretary at the meeting, however, claimed that as a public servant he performed his duty in connection with sending the judges into retirement "without any mala fide intention", a committee member said.

In a surprise move on July 30, the government sent the two judges into retirement for their involvement in the judicial service association's demonstration at the secretariat on July 27.

The two judges--Shajahan Hossain Saju and Abdul Gafur--are president and secretary of the association.

In the face of strong criticism, the government however reinstated them after two days.

The documents submitted at the committee's meeting yesterday show that the Supreme Court was not consulted before taking the action against the judges and that HT Imam initiated the process by sending a note to the law secretary through the establishment secretary.

The Daily Star obtained copies of the documents.

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