# 'Call off hartal, settle dispute by discussion'

BSS, *Dhaka*

Thirty leading cultural personalities yesterday urged BNP to lift their scheduled hartal programme, reconsider its "justification" and settle their disputes with the government through discussions.

"Despite being a democratic right, the issue of its justification of hartal is crucially important," they said in a statement as the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) called a nationwide general strike for November 30.

The statement added the country regained democracy through a protracted campaign and immense losses while it was the responsibilities of all to protect the democratic process.

"We expect joint initiatives of the government in settling all existing crisis and disputes through discussions in a constitutional manner," they said.

The signatories to the statement includes Syed Shamsul Haque, Syed Hassan Imam, Ramendu Majumdar, poets Belal Chowdhury, Mahadeb Saha, Rabiul Hussain, Habibullah Siraji, Muhammad Samad, artist Hashem Khan, Professor Syed Manjurul Islam, Ferdousi Majumdar, Nasiruddin Yusuf, Ataur Rahman, Mafidul Haque, Fakir Alamgir, Pijush Bandapadhay, Golam Quddus, Liakat Ali Lucky, Jhuna Chowdhury, Shimul Yusuf, Afroza Banu, M Hamid, Hassan Arif, Mannan Hira, Pinu Khan, Ashraful Alam, Aslam Sani, Mizanur Rahman, Mahabubul Haidar Mohon and Ahkamullah.

The statement came as different business chambers, including Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, earlier slammed the hartal, calling the planned stoppage would only ruin the bright growth prospect of the national economy.

"This (cantonment house) cannot be an issue for calling hartal," said FBCCI President AK Azad and urged BNP to call off the strike in the greater interest of the country.

Our staff correspondent adds: A number of people under the banner of Shacheton Nagorik Samaj (Conscious Citizen's Society) yesterday demonstrated in an anti-hartal campaign in the city.

Riding in 30 to 40 buses, they chanted slogans against hartal and paraded different city roads while distributing leaflets describing the adverse effects of hartal.

Their slogans were -- "Hartal destroys the country, hartal affects the poor people's livelihood."

People, mostly activists of Awami League and its associate organisations, attended the anti-hartal campaign, sources said.

PHOTO: STAR

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid addresses a three-day conference titled "International conference on interreligious and intercultural dialogue" at the Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Bhaban Auditorium in Dhaka University yesterday.

# Nahid blames some political parties for militancy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid said militancy has risen in Bangladesh as it got patronisation from some political parties but there is no place of militancy as peace loving people of Bangladesh always stand against all kinds of religious fundamentalism.

He was speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural session of a three-day inter-religious and intercultural dialogue at the Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Building of Dhaka University.

The minister said Bangladesh is always a country of religious harmony and there would be no place for fanaticism in the country. "In the constitution of Bangladesh, equal right for all people is ensured," he added.

The government is taking steps to maintain religious harmony, Nahid said.

Speakers at the inaugural session of the dialogue said inter-religious and intercultural dialogues might help fight the rise of militancy across the globe.

Bangladesh National Commission for Unesco (BNCU) and Centre for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue (CIID), an organisation of World Religion and Culture of Dhaka University (DU) jointly organised the conference titled inter-religious and intercultural dialogue.

DU VC Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said some people misuse and abuse religion. State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Shahjahan Miah, Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury also spoke.

# PM blasts Khaleda for hartal

FROM PAGE 1

for illegally living on an army property for long…explain to the people why she has done business with her Gulshan residence," she said.

The premier said it was the BNP cabinet, which had allocated the Gulshan residence for Khaleda.

She was highly critical of the opposition leader and her party leaders for giving "false blame to ISPR" over the cantonment house issue.

Hasina warned that if BNP continues to cause sufferings to the people in the name of movement to protect Khaleda's illegal property, "people will be bound to think differently" about her Gulshan residence.

"She illegally lived in an army residence for long and earned huge money by giving her Gulshan residence on rent. People want to know why she is doing business with her residence," she said.

The PM mentioned that she had left the Gono Bhaban immediately after someone's statement that her stay in Gono Bhaban might influence the election. "I didn't get any order from the court to leave Gono Bhaban. I've not also taken any land or property from the state," she said.

Hasina said her younger sister Sheikh Rehana was given a piece of land at Dhandmondi, which was cancelled by the then BNP cabinet and made a police station on that land. "And being a prime minister, Khaleda Zia went to inaugurate that police station."

She also recalled the assassination of her father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "When I returned home in 1981, late president Ziaur Rahman did not allow us to enter our house on Dhanmondi Road 32. I had to pray for my assassinated family members standing on the street," Hasina said.

Hasina recalled that when she was opposition leader, the then authorities did not allow her to enter the cantonment by car.

"I had to walk five miles to visit ailing Dhaka University Prof Dr Humayun Azad… even then the hospital gate was kept under lock so that I could not enter the hospital," she added.

The PM said, "When the people see no issue or crisis for calling hartal, Khaleda Zia is repeatedly giving hartal. Is it because people are living in peace? In fact, the opposition leader can't tolerate people's peace and prosperity."

About the opposition's demand on electricity, she alleged that when in power, BNP did not add even a single megawatt of electricity to the national grid.

About shedding tears by Khaleda over the cantonment house, Hasina said, "She didn't weep so deeply when she lost her husband. Now she is shedding her tears just to save an illegal property."

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and Bangladesh Ambassador to Belgium Ismat Jahan were present on the occasion.

# First frozen embryo transplant twins born

METRO DESK

Twin test tube babies (one male and another female) from the first successful frozen embryo transfer technique were born yesterday to a childless couple at Apollo Hospital Dhaka.

The babies were born under guidance and care of Dr Mrinal Kumar Sarker, obstetrician/gynaecologist and infertility specialist, says a press release.

Mentionable, the Fertility Centre of the hospital conducted the birth of the first test tube babies in February 2009 under the same doctor.

Through frozen embryo transfer, collected embryos from an infertile couple are kept frozen by a procedure called cryopreservation.

These frozen embryos are later transferred to the mother's uterus for an attempt of a successful pregnancy and this procedure can be repeated several times.

# Home ministry to meet Dhaka MPs today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The home ministry has convened a meeting of the lawmakers of Dhaka at the ministry this morning to discuss and maintain law and order situation during the hartal on next Tuesday.

Home ministry officials said the meeting to be chaired by Home Minister Sahara Khatun, who will review the overall law and order situation in the city ahead of the hartal.

# 57,000 die from smoking related diseases a year

## *Experts tell seminar*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Smoking related diseases account for death almost five times more than people killed in road accidents every year, said speakers at a seminar yesterday.

Urging to stop smoking at public places, they said 12,000 people, on an average, die in road accidents while 57,000 people die due to diseases caused by smoking.

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA), Bangladesh Tamak Birodhi Jote and WBB Trust, jointly organised the seminar on "The necessity for keeping public transport smoking free and steps in this regard" held at BRTA office in the capital.

Professor Pran Gopal Datta, vice chancellor of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said six lakh people die due to smoking in the world every year while one billion people smoke across the world.

He added almost half of the world's children and women are victim of passive smoking as a result of indiscriminate smoking by smokers in public spaces and transports.

In Bangladesh, just 1.5 percent women smoke where 60 percent women are being victimised of passive smoking at public transports and places and 21 percent at their work places, said speakers.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner (DMP) Benazir Ahmed said easy availability of tobacco related products including cigarettes and biri are a barrier for reducing the number of smokers.

He said the trend can be strapped up if government impose tax on tobacco cultivation.

Environmentalist Abu Naser Khan said drivers of public transports should be empowered to realise fine from passengers if they smoke in transports.

BRTA Chairman Aiubur Rahman said packs of cigarettes are widely being used for bribing officials. Cigarette also works as a gateway for drugs, he added.

Speakers also suggested BRTA making stickers bearing anti drug messages for public transports mandatory to obtain fitness certificates. They also urged the drivers to refrain from smoking.

Aiubur Rahman, chairman of BTRC, Mozammel Huq Khan, secretary of communication ministry and Tapan Kumar, director of BRTA spoke at the seminar.


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