

Tripura beckons

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"If Ashuganj becomes a port of call, it will create scope for big financial gain for Bangladesh," he said.

"We had a connection in the past and now we need to find out the missing links as those are very important for the connection. We need to revive the missing links for the economic development of the two countries," the minister noted.

Tripura is the gateway to the entire north-eastern region of India so Bangladesh can derive economic advantages from the market of about 4 crore people and reduce the trade gap with India, he said.

Bangladesh enjoyed a trade surplus with Tripura last year. Bangladesh exported goods worth Rs150 crore to Tripura, while its import was worth only Rs10 crore. Sarkar believes Bangladesh's trade would exceed Rs200 crore this year.

The presence of Bangladesh is conspicuous in Tripura where people not only speak Bangla, they also consume Bangladeshi products and even observe the language day on February 21

every year. "We need to bring our essential commodities from 2,000 miles away... What is the logic to carry the essentials from Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Hariyana? The items are available in Bangladesh and these can be imported to Tripura and other north-eastern states. So, Bangladesh has an immense opportunity to do business for its own economic benefit," the minister said.

Even Bangladeshi investors can invest in various sectors in Tripura. Bangladeshi businessmen have already shown interest in steel industry, food processing and readymade garments, and demand of those is very high even outside of Tripura.

With the establishment of road links between Agartala and Ashuganj, Sabroom of Tripura and the Chittagong port through Feni and expansion of railways from Akhaura to Sabroom, he said goods from Bangladesh will be able to enter Tripura and other north-eastern states and even central India.



The Remacri Bazar...shops thrive on the sides as tourists pour in.

PHOTO COURTESY: BIPESH RAJ

Fear lurks

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salesman. Her daughter is a student of class seven who always remains in fear of being followed by someone.

"I don't know why it happened to a family like ours. We never knew the criminal was hiding under our bed. I appealed to the law enforcers for investigation in vain. Justice is not there for me," Aklima told The Daily Star.

Like Aklima, Aminur Rahman of Rayer Bazar also lost a family member but he holds quite a different view.

Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) picked up his businessman brother Anisur Rahman in early morning hours of Shab-e-Barat in October 2004 when he was returning home from the mosque.

Two days later the family found him at Dhaka Medical College Hospital in a critical condition. Anis died of torture injuries the next day.

Aminur Rahman decided to fight a legal battle for the death of his brother. He enrolled at Asia Pacific University to study law, obtained the degree in 2009 and now practises criminal law as an intern.

"If the trial of Nazis and the war criminals can take place, why can't we try the criminals for the killing of my brother?" asked Amin. During a visit to their house he was found studying the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) sitting on a sofa overlooking a wall on which a photograph of Anis hung.

"I am taking mental preparations now. I have taken up this profession for justice. My education and dedication are all about justice," he said.

Talking about the sorry state of justice, Prof CR Abrar of Dhaka University and president of rights organisation Odhikar said many people think seeking justice is a game of money and power that only the rich deserve.

"We should never think we don't belong to the legal system. We should remember anybody might fall victim anytime if we don't protest now," he said.

Dalil Uddin Bepari, 70-year-old father of Shahjahan, who was killed in "crossfire" in July 2004, also had to leave Dhaka and take shelter in Savar.

Shahjahan was the only bread earner of the family. Formerly a carpenter of Challisher Basti at Jahuri Moholla, Dalil struggles to bear the expenditures of his four-member family including two unmarried daughters.

"Filing of a case requires a lot of money. I had to take money from my brother-in-law even to release the body of my son from the hospital and arrange his funeral," said Dalil.

Justice is still a far cry for many relatives of the "crossfire" victims. Mohammad Shahabuddin, elder brother of Wasim, who was killed by police on October 11 in 2004 in Dholairpar in the capital, said the family is too scared even to think of justice.

"We know very well that filing of a case won't yield any result when the killers are the law enforcers themselves. I did not file a case apprehending further harassment," he added.

Young son of Tusher Islam Titu, who disappeared allegedly after Rab picked him up in July 2008 from Sirajganj, however, keeps asking his mother where his father is.



Anisur Rahman

about our brother? Was he killed? We accept death, but what happens when someone goes missing at the hands of the law enforcers?" said Titu's sister Shoma Islam.

Hope of finding Titu fades fast as even the government enquiry was technically destroyed. The Rab maintains till today that they had nothing to do with the disappearance of Titu, although he was picked up by the elite force amidst hundreds of people.

Titu's father had been bed-ridden since he went missing and can neither stand nor walk.

"You can accept this when there is dictatorship or authoritarian government in the country. When democracy is in effect and the government is enjoying absolute majority in parliament, these incidents are worth to cause utmost concern," said Odhikar Secretary advocate Adilur Rahman Khan.

"It is a very vulnerable situation when the state does not take responsibility to protect the rights of the citizens," said Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain o Salish Kendra.

SM Kamruzzaman Hiru, father of Rakibuzzaman Rakib, who was allegedly killed by criminals under law enforcers' shelter, however, thinks differently.

"What justice? They have killed my son taking him out of jail. What case? Everything is so easy in this country."

Clad in a fatua and lungi, a bearded Kamruzzaman continued angrily, "Can you bring my son back? I will not say a single word about this. Not a single word. Sorry, I cannot even offer you a seat inside."

Without saying a further word, Kamruzzaman slammed the door on the face of this correspondent.

3 hurt

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All three extortionists received bullet injuries during the fight, sources added.

Rab filed a case against the criminals and handed them over to Motijheel Police Station.

50 hurt

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the complaints, adding that the factory remains closed on Fridays.

The authorities were trying to find out the reasons behind the unrest, added the official. Workers alleged that the authorities also forced them to work nearly two hours more as the factory management is going to implement the new wage structure from this month.

Rafiqul Islam, joint secretary (labour) of Bangladesh Garments Manufacturers and Exporters' Association (BGMEA), said they did not receive any complaint about non-payment of extra duty hours. They suspect certain quarter is behind the unrest.

Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Ashulia Police Station, said none was arrested in connection with the incident and no case was filed till 8:00pm.

Maddhyapara

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Of some officials.

At present the company runs an 8-hour shift a day.

The problem arose on November 23 when nine newly appointed assistant managers went to take office. The miners protested their joining and allegedly snatched appointment letters assaulting them, said BCMCL officials.

Md Abul Bashar, general manager (administration) of MGMCL, sued five miners with Parbatipur Police Station on November 25 on charges of snatching documents and assaulting officials.

The accused are Mominul Haque Momin, president of MGMCL Miners' and Workers' Union, vice president Sadequul Islam, general secretary Mostafizur Rahman, organisational secretary Mehdi Hasan and office secretary Shafiqur Rahman.

The authorities also suspended them before filing the case, sources said.

The miners, however, denied the allegation, claiming they prevented the officials from joining office, as the authorities are yet to regularise their (miners') jobs.

At a meeting on Friday, they decided to go for work stoppage. "We will continue our strike until our demands are met," said Mominul, president of workers' union.

Regarding negotiation with the workers, General Manager Md Abul Bashar said the authorities sued them, so no question arises for a negotiated settlement.

The mine incurs an estimated loss of Tk 15 lakh if production remains suspended for a day, sources at the company said.

Lonely hills

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is at a harvestable level.

But signs suggested the numbers are few. All along this nine-hour journey, we sighted only a single pair of cotton pigmy goose. They surely were new to this place to have escaped the eyes of the Marmas. There were a lot of wagtails and a few river lapwings, too. But they are not worth eating.

We walked 22 kilometres to and around Nafakhum, yet found no hoof prints of deer or signs of monkeys.

Only at Tindu did we hear a deer at dusk, its call lonely and mysterious, as mist swirled around the hills in a mystical way. And at Remacri, we heard some holoak gibbons calling from the mountains on the other side of the river.

Not all hope is lost for the wildlife in this wilderness. Dr Reza Khan, a long-time visitor to these forests and a nature lover, feels the introduction of ecotourism holds promise. Offers to sight gibbons, deer and other wildlife for tourists would mean extra income for the hill people. They can be compensated for capping hunting sustainably.

"An effort to stop hunting was very successful at Kaeng Krachan National Park in Thailand where hunting by the ethnic groups was sending many species to extinction," says Ronald Halder, a wildlife photographer. "Then an NGO took initiative to convince the hunters to build hides for photographers to snap wildlife. Now hunting has topped there and the ethnic people make more money by helping photographers."

At Remacri, this also seems possible. Already, tourists are pouring in and bottled water has arrived. Some Marma offer stays at their shanties for Tk 50 a night and food at Tk 80 a meal. Boats are also available at Tk 2,500 a day.

But these are not organised efforts with any links to conservation. And without this, it would be a miracle if the gibbons lived to see many more dawns.

493 BNP men held

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cases and possible troublemakers ahead of the hartal.

Rab sources said they also arrested around 43 people from Tongi area yesterday.

The main opposition claimed the mass arrests over the last two days are aimed to harass its activists and foil Tuesday's hartal.

A DMP high official preferring anonymity said police arrested 290 people Friday, the first day of BNP's protest programme, which brings the average number of the arrestees in the last two days in the capital to 250.

The official said they had only arrested those who are listed criminals or accused and wanted in different cases.

DMP Commissioner Benazir Ahmed said arresting the violators of the law is a regular police duty. Besides, she claimed, they do not consider political identity of a lawbreaker during an arrest.

Another DMP high official, also preferred not to be named, said DMP commissioner held a meeting with officer-in-charge of police stations and deputy commissioners to decide course of action for the hartal day.

The officer said additional 75,000 police and 2,000 Rab personnel will be deployed in the city to show zero tolerance and the DMP is going to deploy four Armoured Personnel Carrier (APC) to avoid any untoward situation.

Outside the capital, over 85 leaders and activists of BNP and its front organisations were arrested in several districts in overnight drives, which the law enforcers claimed as preemptive measures to contain subversive activities ahead of the hartal.

At least 26 BNP activists in Chittagong and 16 in Rajshahi

were arrested in such drives in the last 24 hours.

Of the detainees in Rajshahi, nine were arrested at Baghmara upazila while the rest from different areas in the municipality.

The arrestees include, BNP's Barabhanal union unit vice-president Abdul Mazid and Chhatra Dal unit president Ahmed Hossain of Rajshahi University of Engineering and Technology (Ruet).

In Kurigram, police picked up 14 activists of BNP, Jubo Dal and Chhatra Dal (JCD) from three upazilas on suspicion of violence prior to the hartal.

In Pataukhali, district unit Chhatra Dal president Towfiq Ali Khan Kabir and six other JCD and Jubo Dal leaders were arrested in sadar, Baulal and Galachipa upazilas in the wee hours of Saturday.

Contacted, OC Naresh Chandra Karmaker of Pataukhali Police Station said, "We arrested them as they may conduct destructive activities during the hartal."

Police also arrested three BNP and JCD leaders at their houses during overnight raids in Khulna.

In a news briefing, Nazrul Islam Manju, Khulna City unit BNP president and lawmaker from Khulna-2 constituency, said police are trying to scare the leaders off the hartal.

Ahsanul Haque, officer-in-charge of Chapainawabganj Sadar Police Station, said they arrested three activists of BNP at Batenkhan Morin Chapainawabganj town around 4:30pm when the men were trying to bring out a procession supporting the hartal.

Our correspondents from other districts reported that seven BNP activist in Mymensingh, six in Chandpur and five in Bogra were also arrested yesterday.

SC reopens

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BNP chairperson brought contempt of court charge against the government over her recent "eviction" from the cantonment residence, and seeking permission to return to the house.

She also sought a status quo on the house preventing the government from bringing any change or altering the nature and character of the premises till her leave to appeal petition is pending with the same court.

Meanwhile, the chief justice also reconstituted 13 benches of the High Court Division, sources said.

During the vacation, a bench of the Appellate Division and another bench of the High Court Division heard some urgent matters.

The Appellate and High Court Divisions of the SC went on vacation on November 11 on the occasion of Eid-ul-Azha.

It's sexual

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Tougher laws to expose perpetrators of bullying to justice. But Justice Mohammad Golam Rabbani said the existing law could appropriately punish the perpetrators for which "the victims complain is enough."

The former High Court judge rather said efforts should be made to launch a campaign to regenerate social values to get rid of the growing curse as "degeneration of the values is the prime cause of increasing sexual harassment."

Some of the speakers also criticised the code name "Operation Romeo Hunt" to mean the elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion's (Rab) anti-bullying campaign, which could romanticise the act.

Prof Nasima Akhter Hossain of Jahangirnagar University presided over the discussion while Prof Geetiara Nasreen, Prof Kaberi Gayen, Prof Nasrin Khandoker and Prof Shyamoli Shil, among others, addressed.

Bridge lasted

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Approach sections with soil. In the recent flood, water washed away the soil from underneath the bridge and that caused the collapse, he added.

Md Shakawat Hossain, project implementation officer (PIO) of the upazila, claimed the construction work of the bridge was done according to the schedule but the construction of its connecting parts remained incomplete.

The construction work was done under the rural infrastructure development project. There was no soil test system under the project, the PIO added.

"I would not have permitted the authorities concerned to conduct the construction work of the bridge if the soil test report was provided earlier, said Rajibpur Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) Md Abdul Kader, adding that the decision of constructing the bridge was taken considering the importance of the area.

A five-member inquiry committee has been formed on October 6 to investigate the incident with upazila vice-chairman as convener, he said. Although the probe body was supposed to submit its report on November 6, it got one month more as it could not complete inquiry in the bridge area due to increase in the water level in Kolkhara river, the UNO added.

The other members of the committee are upazila engineer, upazila health engineer, PIO and the concerned UP chairman.

More hartals

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The November 30 hartal.

In a press statement, he said around 250 party leaders of different ranks were arrested yesterday and several hundred others were injured in police baton charge while campaigning in support of the hartal.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's adviser Abdul Awal Mintoo and a number of party leaders conducted the campaign at different points in the capital.

They also circulated leaflets mentioning the government's "wrongdoings" and "failures" in running the country.

At a discussion meeting at the Jatiya Press Club, Moudud Ahmed said, "We are warning the government of a series of hartal after November 30 if it does not stop repression on opposition parties."

He ruled out BNP's joining parliament session as, he said, the government does not allow opposition lawmakers to criticise its wrongdoings.

"The government has made parliament almost dysfunctional. Bypassing the House, they (govt) are reprinting the constitution. But the Supreme Court in a verdict asked them to reprint the constitution after bringing amendments to it in parliament," Moudud said at the discussion on "Rule of law, human rights, price hike of essentials and nepotism in administration."

Talking to journalists at the grave of president Ziaur Rahman, BNP standing committee members Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and Hannan Shah said the party will be bound to call a series of hartal if the government creates an 'anarchic' situation centring the hartal on November 30.

"We do not believe in destructive politics. The government alone will be responsible if any untoward situation on the hartal day due to its oppression," Goyeshwar said.

Both the leaders visited Zia's grave along with the new president of Dhaka district unit of BNP Abdul Mannan to pay homage to founder of the party.

Meanwhile, Khaleda Zia yesterday sought support from Jamaat-e-Islami and pro-BNP professional bodies for the hartal called by it.

The leader of the opposition in parliament had separate meetings with leaders of

Obama

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10-person game at Fort McNair, a US military post in Washington.

"After being inadvertently hit with an opposing player's elbow in the lip... the president received 12 stitches today, administered by the White House Medical Unit," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said in a statement.

The president was given a local anesthetic while receiving the stitches, Gibbs said.

Obama was later spotted by reporters through an upstairs White House window holding what appeared to be a compress against his mouth, while the White House Christmas tree was being delivered outside.

US alerts allies

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an impact," he said. 'EXPOSING LIVES'

In an interview with CNN to be broadcast on Sunday but released as a transcript, Adm Mullen said Wikileaks' actions were "extremely dangerous".

"We live in a world where just a little bit of information can be added to a network of information and really open up an understanding that just wasn't there before," he said.

Adm Mullen said the documents would endanger the lives of US troops and individuals working with them, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

"I would hope that those who are responsible for this would, at some point in time, think about the responsibility that they have for lives that they're exposing," he said.

A spokesman for UK Prime Minister David Cameron said on Friday: "Obviously, the government has been briefed by US officials, by the US ambassador, as to the likely content of these leaks."

"I don't want to speculate about precisely what is going to be leaked before it is leaked."

The BBC's Steve Kingstone, in Washington, says the state department is clearly in high gear, contacting embassies around the world.

The media does not yet know precisely what Wikileaks has - in what could be up to three million documents - and it is possible that the state department does not know exactly what the site has either, our correspondent says.

Jamaat, a key component of the BNP-led four-party alliance, and several professional bodies at her Gulshan office in the capital.

At the meeting with Jamaat's acting Ameer Maqbul Ahmad and Acting Secretary General ATM Azharul Islam, Khaleda also discussed the latest political situation ahead of the hartal, meeting sources said.

Contacted, Azharul later said that the BNP chief sought their support for the hartal.

"In response, we told her that we will discuss the issue in our party forum and then inform her our decision in this regard," he said.

The BNP chief later held meetings with pro-BNP bodies of teachers, lawyers, journalists, film personalities and others at the same venue.

Call off hartal

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Business and does not allow us to meet buyers' deadline. During the strike hours, our factories remain shut and we cannot take our items to the Chittagong Port for shipment."

"Besides, movement of raw materials is also hampered seriously," he told a press conference at the trade body's Dhaka office.

Knitwear exports posted a whopping 37.97 percent growth in the first four months of the current fiscal year. \$2.88 billion was fetched during July-October.

Apparel makers attributed the growth to a shift in orders from other competing countries, especially China, the world's largest apparel supplier, and Bangladesh's success in exploring new markets.

"We have been growing tremendously for the past few years. We want to continue the trend. So the government and the opposition should work together to reach a consensus and help us grow," said AH Aslam Sunny, vice president (finance) of BKMEA.

He said the shutdown programme comes at a time when the country has restored its image as a stable country and the knitwear sector receives more orders from buyers.

"Many buyers have diverted from China to Bangladesh as China-made products cost more. At a time when we get most orders, a programme like hartal is suicidal for knitwear sector as well as the country's economy," Sunnysaid.

The remarks came as BNP prepares to enforce its second nationwide dawn-to-dusk shutdown in 16 days, after the main opposition party observed hartal on November 14, three days before the Eid-ul-Azha.

The apex trade body, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, has already requested BNP to withdraw strike.

FBCCI also suggested the government pass laws in parliament, banning such political practice that upsets economic growth and investment potential.

papers suggesting that Turkey helped al-Qaeda militants in Iraq, and that the US helped Iraq-based Kurdish separatists who have been engaged in a long conflict with Turkey.

The Russian foreign ministry told Interfax news agency that Moscow had not been officially contacted by the US state department over the possible leak of diplomatic correspondence.

But Russia's Kommersant newspaper said the expected release included discussions between US diplomats and Russian politicians and "unflattering" opinions of some of the latter.

The release is also thought to include cables concerning Israeli-American relations. 'ABSOLUTELY AWFUL'

Washington's ambassador to Iraq, James Jeffrey, is quoted by AFP news agency as saying Wikileaks is an "absolutely awful impediment" to US efforts to build trust with other nations.

"I do not understand the motivation for releasing these documents," he told reporters in Baghdad. "They will not help, they will simply hurt our ability to do our work here."

The source of the documents potentially involved in the latest Wikileaks release is not known.

However, US Army Private Bradley Manning, a military analyst who was arrested in June on suspicion of leaking classified data, is currently in custody awaiting trial.

He is alleged to have abused access to a secret-level network to obtain tens of thousands of US state department cables, some of them classified.