

No wrong done

FROM PAGE 1
Bank to Grameen Kalyan.
The Grameen Bank founder described the disagreement with Norad, the Norwegian aid ministry, as honest disagreement and said it was a difference of opinion on "modality".
"Other donor agencies did not raise any question on the modality, but Norad did. Later, we had resolved it," said Prof Yunus.

Yunus said he is saddened to see how much of the local media dealt with the issue, and falsely suggested a diversion of funds for purposes unintended by the donors. He, however, wanted to put the controversy behind him and work untidily for eliminating poverty in Bangladesh.
The Nobel laureate made the comments at a press conference at Grameen Bank headquarters in Mirpur yesterday. He addressed the media to resolve the debate that caused mental agony not only to him but also to many people in the country.

Prof Yunus said some local media published an inaccurate and misleading news report regarding an alleged "siphoning off" of a large amount of money by him through one of his organisations. The aid had been agreed, in 1994, between Grameen Bank and Norad to be used for housing loans for the poor in Bangladesh.

Reports in the local media were triggered following a documentary "Fanget I Mikrogjeld" (caught in micro debt) shown on Norwegian TV on November 30.

Yunus, however, ruled out any legal action against such libellous news reports that he was "siphoning off" Tk 7 billion.

He also saw no conspiracy against him, though he said some individuals might have added fuel to the controversy.

The microcredit pioneer read out a two-page statement explaining the issue of fund transfer that triggered the debate. He explained the job benefits he receives from Grameen Bank and his dream of sending poverty into the museums. Later, he answered questions of reporters on a wide range of issues including tax exemption, microcredit, public relations, corporate governance, GrameenPhone and social business.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Norway on the fund transfer
Prof Yunus showed how a latest Norad report on its assistance to Grameen Bank on December 7 cleared Grameen Bank from all allegations of wrongdoing. The report was published following a request from Erik Solheim, the minister for environment and international development.

"According to the report, there is no indication that Norwegian funds have been used for unintended purposes, or that Grameen Bank has engaged in corrupt practices or embezzled funds. The matter was concluded when the agreement concerning reimbursement of the funds was entered into in May 1998 under the government in office at the time," said Solheim.

His role at Grameen Bank and in its sister concerns
Prof Yunus said he does not receive any monetary benefits, house, car or any allowance from any organisations other than Grameen Bank. He gets salaries and other benefits from Grameen Bank as its official. He has no share in Grameen Bank or any of its various organisations. Though he sits on Grameen Bank and other boards, he has no voting power.

Tax exemption
Grameen Bank gets tax exemption from the government. Grameen has applied to extend the facility on the eve of its expiry. Prof Yunus replied to a query that he has sought tax exemption for Grameen Bank because it benefits the poor.

"It's my moral responsibility to demand tax exemption," he said. "If tax is imposed on Grameen then do it for other NGOs," he said, adding that other NGOs (micro lenders) get tax exemptions.

Microcredit
Muhammad Yunus defended microcredit as an effective tool in cutting down poverty but criticised the abuse of it.
He criticised over-commercialisation of microcredit by SKS, India's largest for-profit micro financier.

After meeting the same delegation at his office separately, Home Minister Sahara Khatun said there are conspiracies to create unrest in the garments sector.

She pledged to launch an investigation to expose the conspirators behind the workers' unrest.
"If anything happens, workers take to the street and vandalise vehicles. None will be spared if anyone takes the law in hand," warned the home minister.

Meanwhile, the labour ministry officials and representatives of RMG factory owners and workers will sit with the BGMEA leaders today at the BGMEA Bhawan to settle the RMG unrest.

It proved Delwar's ignorance as the TIN was introduced in the country during 1990s, Ashraf commented.

Tamim

FROM PAGE 1
The left-handed opener's 95 off 96 balls had five boundaries and seven sixes, breaking his own Bangladesh record of six sixes in an innings, that too was against Zimbabwe last year. He also overtook Mashrafe Bin Mortaza as the man with the most ODI sixes for the Tigers, and equaled the highest number of sixes in an innings hit in this country.

A cautious start made sure man-of-the-match Tamim was set for some big ones and he launched his array with a forehand smash over long-off, following it up with a slogged sweep off part-timer Brendan Taylor. Twice he lofted leg-spinner Graeme Cremer over long-on and hit another on one knee, slogging over mid-wicket.

Keith Dabengwa, the left-arm spinner, also bore the brunt of the local boy's bat, twice being hit for sixes, but after Tamim had entered the nineties through the second one off Dabengwa, nerves got the better of him as on the next ball, he miscued one to deep mid-wicket and was out caught by Hamilton Masakadza.

The left-hander shared a 133-run second wicket stand with Junaed Siddiqui, who rode his luck to score an unbeaten 56. Tamim too survived an early life when Chris Mpfu dropped him when he was on 24.

Before Tamim had made it a backyard affair, batting seemed to be a tough job for the visitors who took 24 overs to reach 50 runs, incidentally through their first boundary.

Tatenda Taibu, who hit that first four, salvaged the Zimbabwe innings through a 95-run fourth wicket stand with Craig Ervine. Taibu made 64 off 104 balls with a four and a six while left-handed Ervine struck 46 off 100 balls.

It was Mashrafe's first seven overs that essentially kept the visitors in check, the paceman picking up two for 25 in the end. Shakib took three wickets for 58.

The No 1 all-rounder of the world won a motorcycle for his all-round performance but it was the highest wicket-taker in the series, Abdur Razzak, who won the man-of-the-series award.

AL questions
FROM PAGE 16
Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia possessed earlier and to save her "corrupt" sons - Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam at a press conference at party president Sheikh Hasina's political office in Dhanmondi termed Parishad Chairman Muhiuddin Khan a "war criminal, rajakar and anti-liberation element."

Muhiuddin has recently announced the hartal to protest against the National Education Policy.

Syed Ashrafur Islam said if the main opposition did not have any relations with the war criminals, they would not extend their support to Muhiuddin's hartal.

The AL leader urged the opposition to withdraw their support for hartal and expressed the hope that people would reject the strike.

Ashraf, also the LGRD and cooperatives minister, demanded that the government launch a probe into any mismatch between the wealth statements Khaleda Zia submitted to the Election Commission (EC), Anti-Corruption Commission and the National Board of Revenue and the assets she possesses right now.

"We will urge these organisations to find out if there is any anomaly in Khaleda Zia's sources of income, current wealth accounts and what she submitted to these agencies," Ashraf added.

Protesting against BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain's statements about the health accounts of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and other family members, Ashraf urged his counterpart not to make any false statement before the nation.

He said the BNP leader made false statements over the issue to mislead the people and divert public attention from corruption "committed" by the Khaleda Zia family.

The list of Khaleda's belongings at the cantonment house that the PM read out in parliament is completely true and based on facts and figures, he said, adding, they would make it public, if need be.

Delwar has recently spoke about Bangabandhu and Hasina's property and wanted to know the Tax Identification Number of Bangabandhu.

It proved Delwar's ignorance as the TIN was introduced in the country during 1990s, Ashraf commented.

People's nerves

FROM PAGE 1
For those stranded on the Airport Road, it was a harrowing experience, as the demonstrators went on the rampage smashing buses and cars.

More than 100 people including 20 policemen were injured when protesters clashed with police.

The workers set fire to three vehicles and damaged over 50 others.

"I was going to Khilgaon to see a doctor. Sitting for two hours in the bus, I realised I cannot see the doctor today. So I got down and started walking back home," said Monsura Begum near Bishwa Road.

The 51-year-old had to walk nearly six kilometres to reach her home in Uttara.

Most commuters had to do the same. Some took rickshaws or rickshaw vans to reach their destinations.

"Why can't they relocate all the factories from Dhaka? Why should we take the brunt of the garment sector?" said Shahin Chowdhury, who missed an important business appointment due to the violence.

Rehana, an upper division assistant of Special Branch of police, was going to her office at Malibagh by office bus.

"When the bus arrived at Kuril, some people started pelting bricks breaking the windowpanes," she said.

Tiger response team proves a point

STAFF CORRESPONDENT
A village-based tiger response team has again showed great courage to save a tiger of the Sundarbans.

On December 10, a tiger suddenly came out of the forest and entered the village Uttar Rajapur, under Sharankhola range of the Sundarbans. It then killed a cow and returned to the forest, says a Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB) press release.

As the villagers became scared and agitated thinking about the return of the tiger, a village-based tiger response team (VTRT) of Dasherbarani came to their aid.

The VTRT members communicated with the local forest department offices and went on patrol with forest officials that night.

They also communicated with the authorities concerned of the local mosque and convinced them to announce a cautionary notice repeatedly. During the announcement from the mosque, they requested the villagers to remain calm, alert and safe.

"If we can save a tiger then the Sundarbans will be protected. And if the forest is protected our livelihoods would be secured. There is no other way except saving the tiger," said Md Dulal Chaprashi, team leader of the Dasherbarani VTRT.

Ashrafur Haque of Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh (WTB), who helped the villagers set up a VTRT team, said, "Still our tiger conservation approaches have a long way to go. But obviously in the case of building the field-level capacity to deal with the immediate tiger-human conflict needs, it is obviously a feather in the cap for the village teams. With this kind of supportive people, the tiger has a much better chance of survival in nature."

Prof Anwarul Islam of WTB also mentioned, "The VTRT is a community-based team which has been formed by the joint initiative of the Forest Department and the Wildlife Trust of Bangladesh."

At present there are 29 village-based teams around the adjacent areas of the Sundarbans. The team members will also control the crowd that forms when a tiger strays into a village until the forest department officials reach there, he said, adding that all the members of VTRT are volunteers and they spend their time to help save tigers and keep their villages safe.

Follow rule
FROM PAGE 16
The minister alleged most institutions are operating like commercial organisations in residential areas. They are enrolling huge number of students and using limited space on markets, shops, hotels or restaurants and CNG refuelling stations.

He said some people turned the universities into family organisation while absolute supremacy of the owners is prevailing in some universities.

In this context, the ministry has labelled the universities into three categories--'red', 'yellow' and 'green'.

The universities which failed to establish necessary infrastructures on their permanent campuses will get additional five years from now on to go to their permanent campuses, the minister mentioned.

These universities will even not be allowed to run extended or additional campuses and institutes and launch new faculty or programme.

After the passage of the bill in parliament, the ministry officials sat with the owners of the private universities on August 18 and gave them three weeks to inform about the approximate time required for the shifting.

The owners did not respond to the ministry's directives for twice and finally on November 22 came up with the demand for giving 15 years more. They also sought land from the government.

Private universities got temporary approval on condition that they will have to have permanent campuses and shift there within five years of opening, said Nahid.

"But we are observing with grave concern that only eight out of 51 private universities have shifted to their permanent campuses," he added.

The universities that shifted to permanent campuses are -- North South University; University of Science & Technology, Chittagong; International Islamic University, Chittagong; Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology; International University of Business Agriculture & Technology; BGC Trust University Bangladesh; Tric University; and Bangladesh University of Business & Technology.

Replying to a question, University Grants Commission Chairman Prof Nazrul Islam said this is a 'red alert' for the universities which failed to comply with the act.

Of the total, five universities bought lands and constructed infrastructure while nine others bought land but did not start construction. Nine universities have their own campuses of limited land, falling short of the size fixed by the act, while 22 others have not yet taken any initiative in this regard, said the minister.

Hijacked ship

FROM PAGE 1
Urmila Sharmin, wife of Abul Bashar, 28, second engineer of the ship, said the pirates demanded \$9 million, while Bilkis Rahman, the mother of another crew, said the abductors demanded Tk 900 crore.

Urmila said her husband called her at about 10:00pm from the phone of a pirate and said the pirates asked him to pay a ransom of \$9 million as soon as possible.

Bashar talked to her for nearly three minutes and said the ship would run out of food and fuel in five days.

Earlier, the ship owner claimed that the vessel had a stock of food and fuel for the crew for two months.

The pirates hijacked the Bangladesh-flagged ship in the Arabian Sea off the coast of India on December 5.

Bilkis Rahman, mother of engine cadet Md Shahriar Rabbi, 21, said her son called her at about 10:10am yesterday and said the pirates had confined the crew to the navigation deck.

She said Rabbi sobbed during the 10-minute conversation. He told her that they were allowed to use only one toilet.

"Please rescue us. Tell the government to do something, otherwise the pirates will torture us," she quoted her son as saying.

Meanwhile, Mohammad Shahjahan, owner of SR Shipping Ltd, said the pirates allowed the ship's Chief Engineer Motiul Maola and his wife Roksanat to talk to him over the phone at about 2:30pm. The two told him that all the crewmembers were in good health.

Shahjahan, also chairman of Royal Shipping Ltd, told journalists that the prates made two phone calls -- one at 2:30pm and another at 7:00pm. He was speaking at a press conference at his office in Agrabad in the port city last night.

He said 24 Somali pirates held control of the ship.

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Govt moves

FROM PAGE 1
developments every month, said the minister.

The taskforce also set a new deadline for marking the land of rivers and setting up boundary pillars along the riverbank in Dhaka, Gazipur, Munshiganj and Narayanganj.

Shahjahan said the tender for setting up the boundary pillars will be completed by January 5 next year.

The taskforce earlier directed the deputy commissioners of Dhaka, Narayanganj, Gazipur and Munshiganj to set up those by April this year.

The draft National River Protection Commission Act, 2010 was submitted at yesterday's meeting. The draft will be placed before the cabinet in a week or two, the minister added.

If enacted, the law will prevent river pollution, stop river grabbing and building illegal structures on riverbanks.

According to the draft, the commission will comprise a chairman and five members. The chairman and a member will be given permanent appointment while the four others will hold honorary posts.

The commission will be empowered to file cases against the grabbers while an aggrieved person can also file cases against the commission.

The high-powered taskforce also instructed the Rajdhani Unnayan Katiripakkha (Rajuk) and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) to take legal actions against the house owners who connected their sewage lines with the underground storm water lines that ultimately fall into rivers and pollute them.

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Four killed

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The protesters set five vehicles ablaze and damaged 90 more bringing traffic on Chittagong Airport Road, Dhaka Airport Road and Dhaka-Sylhet Highway to a halt for hours.

The clashes led to the closure of the entire CEPZ in the morning and suspension of production at three factories in Dhaka and another in Narayanganj. The CEPZ houses 156 factories with 1,54,000 workers.

Mohammad Abul Qasem, commissioner of Chittagong Metropolitan Police, said one of the dead was Ariful Islam, 35, a rickshaw puller.

He said the cause of death could be confirmed after autopsy.

The CMP commissioner said 56 policemen were wounded including one bullet hit. Six of them were in a critical condition.

"A third party might have fired shots during clashes leaving Constable Rafiqul Alam injured," he said.

He CMP chief said police fired 519 rounds of rubber bullet, 60 rounds from Chinese rifles and shotguns, and 96 tear gas canisters to disperse the demonstrators.

Witnesses said nearly 10,000 workers of 11 units of Korean Youngone Ltd in CEPZ went to work in the morning without any knowledge about the authority's decision of indefinite shutdown of the units on Saturday following labour unrest over wage.

Earlier, the workers of Youngone Ltd took to the streets demanding reinstatement of a "temporary" Tk 250 food allowance that the management withheld when it started paying the new minimum wage, said an official of the company.

Finding the factories closed, they became furious and clashed with police for about five hours since 8:30am turning the entire CEPZ area into a battlefield.

The workers tried to break through the main gate of the Youngone Ltd. They damaged gates and windowpanes of other factories. Labourers of other factories later joined them.

Tanvir Arafat, assistant commissioner of police in Double-Mooring Zone, said hundreds of angry workers clashed with police at about 8:30am when law enforcers barred them from blocking the Airport Road near the main entrance of the CEPZ.

Police charged truncheons on the demonstrators who pelted them with bricks. Law enforcers fired shots and tear gas shells to disperse them.

The workers took position at different points from Airport road to Agrabad Barik building bringing vehicular movement on the road to a halt.

Rezaul Masud, senior assistant director of Chittagong Industrial Police, said unruly workers set fire to a bus and a motorbike, and damaged 30 other vehicles. They ransacked eight garment factories and 20 roadside buildings.

Four people were killed and 90 others, including 56 policemen and three journalists, injured in the clashes. Of the wounded, eight were hit by bullets. Ten of the injured were admitted to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Deputy Commissioner (Port) Kushum Dewan claimed rickshaw-puller Ariful died after being hit by a brickbat during the clash in front of the CEPZ at about 12:00noon. But his employer said he was shot dead.

Police later took his body to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Ruhi Das, 45, worker of CM Superior Garments, got injured at the CEPZ main gate while coming out of his factory shortly after 11:00am.

Ruhi, a resident of Pathorghata, was rushed to a local hospital and later shifted to the CMCH where the doctors declared him dead at about 1:30pm, said his nephew Titu Das.

Police held 30 people with links to the clashes.

Nasa Group's three units--Kimia Garments, Sunseed Apparels and Eden Apparels--gathered near Kuril Bishwa Road around 8:00am, demanding implementation of the new wagescale.

The workers allege the factory owners have added only Tk 500 to their earlier salaries instead of following the new wagescale.

Witnesses said the clashes broke out when police resisted the demonstrators trying to block the road at 9:00am.

For around two hours, the workers fought pitched battle with the law enforcers in Kuril Bishwa Road and Radisson Hotel areas.

Several policemen had to swim across the canal beside the Airport Road to flee a group of angry workers in their wake.

Traffic on the road returned to normal at 11:30am.

Some of the workers left the Airport Road and returned to their factories, ransacking all three units.

Nizamul Huq Mollah, additional deputy commissioner of police (Gulshan division), told The Daily Star they arrested seven people in connection with the violence.

Our Narayanganj correspondent reports: At least 25 people including five cops were injured during chase and counter-chase between police and garment workers in Rugganj yesterday morning.

Police held five people on the spot.

The workers, mostly of Robin Tex BD Ltd at Bhulta Gausia, blocked Dhaka-Sylhet highway for an hour and ransacked several vehicles.

They were protesting the closure of the factory following Saturday's violence, which left 10 people injured.

As the workers went to work around 8:00am yesterday, they saw the closure notice and flew into rage.

They tried to go inside the factory but were resisted by the law enforcers who had been deployed there after Saturday's violence.

Thwarted, they took to Dhaka-Sylhet highway and ransacked several vehicles, halting vehicular movement for an hour.

At around 10:00am, law enforcers lobbed 15 teargas shells and baton-charged the demonstrators. They also shot 3 times in the air to bring the situation under control.

BNP tells

FROM PAGE 16
democratic institutions so that it can rule the country without any opposition party, but people will not allow this, they said.

They protested "repression" on the opposition and called upon representatives of foreign countries and donor agencies in Bangladesh to raise their voice against violation of human rights in the country.

The leaders and professionals were speaking at a discussion meeting on "Erosion of Political Rights, Gathering Storms", at a city hotel on the occasion of Human Rights Day 2010. A forum of pro-BNP professionals -- G-9 -- organised it.

The speakers also criticised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for her recent remarks about Nobel laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus. The way the premier blasted him is unfortunate since he is the most respected Bangladeshi in the world.

A video presentation on the recent incidents of human rights violation across the country was aired at the discussion meeting.

Representatives of several embassies and donor agencies were present at the programme, but none of them spoke despite repeated requests from the organisers.

Speakers included BNP leaders MK Anwar, Abdul Moyeen Khan, Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Nasiruddin Asim and senior journalist Shafiq Rehman.

MKANwar said the AL government wants to eliminate the opposition to perpetuate its rule but people will not accept it.

Urging all to take a serious note of the human rights situation in the country, Moyeen Khan said the government is involved in 95 percent incidents of human rights violation.