

Peaceful hartal

FROM PAGE 20
road except for rickshaws. Vehicular movement became normal around 4.00pm.

Law enforcers kept at bay the leaders and activists of city BNP as they tried to take to the streets in the morning.

Huge contingents of police were deployed at Bahaddarhat and Nasiman Bhaban, two key points where BNP men gathered in two previous hartals.

BNP Chittagong city unit president Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury along with 50 to 60 party activists and leaders brought out a procession from his Mehedibagh residence and was heading towards the party office at about 11:00am.

Police stopped them at Chattershwari crossing and requested them not to proceed further.

Talking to reporters, Khasru criticised the government for obstructing the procession. The BNP leader claimed that the people of Chittagong fully supported the hartal.

Jedan Al Musa, assistant police commissioner of Kotwali zone, said they stopped the procession to prevent any worsening of the situation and damage of public property. BNP's Chittagong city unit

called an eight-hour hartal from 6:00am in the port city hours after the arrest of the party's standing committee member Salauddin Quader Chowdhury in Dhaka on Thursday. On December 17, the hartal was extended to a full-day one.

Quader was arrested on charges of planning and financing an arson attack on a car in Moghbazar on June 26 that left one person dead.

Meanwhile, Awami League Chittagong city unit held an anti-hartal rally on the old railway station premises around 3.30pm.

Addressing the rally, AL city unit president ABM Mohiuddin Chowdhury demanded capital punishment of Salauddin Quader Chowdhury for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity during the Liberation War in 1971.

Activities inside Chittagong Port, however, continued with loading and unloading of 36 vessels at different jetties and outer anchorage duly completed.

Biman Bangladesh Station Manager Md Abul Kashem said all Biman flights to and from Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport operated on schedule.

Trains to and from the port city also ran normally.

Zimbabwe heads for turmoil after Mugabe poll boost

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe faces renewed political and economic turmoil as President Robert Mugabe's push for polls next year and threats to kick out Western firms are sending the nation backwards, analysts said yesterday.

The veteran leader, who has been in power since independence from Britain in 1980, was on Saturday endorsed by his ZANU-PF party to contest a likely fierce election battle against the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC).

Mugabe is expected to face MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai, the current prime minister and his long-time foe, in a presidential vote, after he said an almost two-year power-sharing arrangement between their parties would end in February.

However, Mugabe's quest for polls and bombastic, hard-faced rhetoric that he could nationalise British and American companies risks unravelling progress made since 2009 that saw hyperinflation ended and a sense of normality return.

"We are our own worst enemies because we let politicians craft the agenda of the nation," Calisto Jokonya, a business executive and past president of the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, told AFP.

Hyperinflation -- which started to soar towards world record levels in the wake of Mugabe's confiscation of white-owned farms a decade ago -- marked Zimbabwe's slide towards the economic abyss.

3 BNP leaders

FROM PAGE 20 night against five people including Amanullah Aman, Nazim Uddin Alam, and Habibunnabi Khan Sohel, said airport police.

The identity of the other two accused remained unknown.

The complainant said the accused obstructed airport staff from discharging their duties, and trespassed into the VIP lounge.

Hijacked ship

FROM PAGE 1 said the pirates contacted the ship's owner company on December 12 and demanded a ransom of \$ 9 million within five days.

"Otherwise they would kill the crew. But we didn't see any concrete step from the government or from the ship's operating company to rescue them," they added.

The prime minister herself is a mother, they said, adding she would feel the pain of the mothers of those crews.

Mahfuza Khatun, wife of the third engineer Tariqul Islam, read out the written statement.

"I was married to him just one year ago," said Mahfuza as tears rolled down her cheeks while making an appeal to the prime minister.

"My sister-in-law is on board the ship. We are very much worried as we don't know what kind of behaviour she is facing out there," said Laila Khatun, the elder sister of Md Matiar Maola, chief engineer of the vessel.

Sharmin Akhter, wife of sailor Kibriya Ahmed, told journalists that she married Kibriya 13 months ago and they had a conjugal life of only one month.

About 10,000 Bangladeshi sailors are currently working in different ships and sending remittances of \$ 34 million to the country as their monthly salary, claimed the families.

Meanwhile, Shipping Minister Sajahan Khan yesterday said the government is aware about the situation and trying to free the crew.

"The government has contacted different international agencies who can help rescuing the sailors," added the minister.

The vessel was hijacked from the Arabian sea on December 5, 1300 nautical miles off Somali coast.

Twenty-five crew and wife of the chief engineer, all Bangladeshi nationals, are aboard.

Feuds in BNP

FROM PAGE 20 A number of standing committee members, the joint secretaries general and organising secretaries are now working hard to finalise the mayoral candidates, said sources in the party.

According to them, many leaders have already joined the campaign in most of the municipalities.

Tasbirul Islam, president of Kurigram district unit, said they are trying to convince the leaders in an attempt to support single candidate for each of the three municipalities under the district.

BNP lawmaker Rehana Akhtar Ranu said they have chosen two candidates against four municipalities under Feni district. "We have several qualified leaders almost everywhere, so we need a few days more to pick contestants," she added.

Nazrul Islam Rajan, joint convener of Barisal (south) unit, blamed two central leaders for their interference in the candidate selection process.

The leaders have resolved disputes through discussions to ensure one candidate, said Tariqul Islam, party standing committee member and also coordinator for Khulna division.

"Problems have been solved for most municipalities," added the former minister, who was assigned to coor-

dinate party activities for 35 municipalities under the division.

Meanwhile, the party high command has asked a number of leaders, who are willing to contest ignoring party decision, to come to the capital for talks.

BNP leaders Golam Nabi Alamgir and Shafiqul Islam Kiron of Bhola are conducting campaign against each other and both of them were asked to meet central monitoring committee to resolve the dispute.

BNP Vice Chairman Alif Hossain Chowdhury and certain other leaders asked three leaders of Patuakhali to file nomination papers.

An incumbent mayor and BNP leader Moshataq Ahmed said the decisions taken in the capital do not matter and that he will contest the polls with party support.

Local units in Jessore and Rajbari have finalised the candidates through secret vote.

Brig Gen (ret'd) ASM Hannan Shah, standing committee member, is working to pick candidates for Dhaka division, while Mirza Abbas for Barisal, Jamiruddin Sircar for Rajshahi and Samsar Mobin Chowdhury for Sylhet division, party leaders said.

Elections to the municipalities are scheduled to start from January 12 next year.

Record stock fall

FROM PAGE 1 stocks plunged by 6 percent on a single-day.

Market insiders blamed the recent fall on the central bank's measures to control the liquidity flow in the banking system.

In an effort to contain inflation, the central bank recently increased the Cash Reserve Ratio (CRR) for banks by 50 basis points to 6 percent. It was also aimed at stopping credit-flow to non-productive sectors.

The central bank also issued another directive asking financial institutions to adjust their stock investment exposure by this month.

From January, no institution will be allowed to invest more than 10 percent of its total liabilities in the stock market, and the exposure will be calculated based on market price, not cost price.

The International Monetary Fund's prescription to Bangladesh Bank for addressing the overexposure of commercial banks to the stock market also propelled the unprecedented fall.

The SEC's excessive initiatives to cool the market in a short time are also blamed for the crash.

"The measures and unexpected and unnecessary intervention of a donor agency took a big toll on the market," said Akter Hossain Sannamat, managing director of Prime Finance and Investment.

"It is not the duty of the regulator to control the index... their responsibility is to check irregularities or manipulative transactions. Besides, donor agencies have

nothing to do with our stock market," he said.

Echoing him, SEC Executive Director Anwarul Kabir Bhuiyan said, "Institutional investors generally sell off their investments in this period to restructure their portfolios before the end of the year."

Taken aback by the crash, the stock market regulator sat twice and took initiatives to help the market rebound.

The Securities and Exchange Commission suspended the computation based on net asset value (NAV) in providing share credit by lenders.

According to the NAV-based calculation, a merchant banker or a stockbroker gives loan on the basis of the value of a stock by adding the market value to NAV and dividing the sum by two.

The SEC increased the share credit ratio to 1:1.5 from 1:1. It means an investor will get a loan of Tk 1.5 against shares worth Tk 1.

The commission also withdrew a directive on members margin, which was to take effect from January 2 next year.

The SEC on November 25 asked the members or stockbrokers to double their deposits against any additional trade exposure to the capital market in a bid to control the liquidity flow.

The regulator also directed the bourses to put the stocks of Grameenphone and Marico Bangladesh back on public market or under normal trading system instead of spot market transaction.

It's time to act

FROM PAGE 1 moving forward. Our government's success or failure will depend on the actions we take in the remaining three years," she said adding that every minister should keep the matter in mind and work accordingly.

A power-point presentation of the government's 2009-10 fiscal year's activities was displayed to the cabinet, and the prime minister expressed her satisfaction regarding the overall progress of development activities.

She expressed satisfaction about the last fiscal year's agricultural production, import and export, advancement in education, improvement in law and order, and other development indicators, Prime Ministers' Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad told reporters after the meeting.

As some ministers said reports from their ministries were not properly included in the presentation, the prime minister gave them 15 more days to complete the reports.

"SABOTAGE" Terming the recent incident of fire at Hameem Group's factory that killed at least 28 garment workers, and recovery of a huge cache of bullets in Sherpur border area as "acts of sabotage", the prime minister said more of "such subversive activities" might be carried out in the coming days, which will test the government's mettle.

The prime minister directed the authorities concerned to examine whether traces of gunpowder could be found among the causes of the fire in

Anti-trafficking law

FROM PAGE 20 household servitude will also be considered human trafficking.

For the first time, the government has defined labour trafficking in the draft law. It says transferring people by illegal force or deception in the name of jobs will fall into labour trafficking. Someone may not be subjected to servitude, bonded labour or debt bondage, but that will not lessen the gravity of his trafficker's crime, the draft says.

The home ministry today holds a national seminar to further discuss the draft act before finalising and sending it to the cabinet for approval, said Kamal Uddin Ahmed, convener of the committee formed to draft the act.

Around 70 lakh Bangladeshis work abroad and send home \$10 billion plus annually while yearly outflow of workers is now four to five lakh.

The government has taken steps to enact the law amidst widespread reports of human trafficking.

The Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report, 2010 released by the US last June said a huge number of Bangladeshis fell victim to trafficking after they were deluded into believing that there were good offers of employment overseas for them. But eventually they were exploited in situations of forced labour or debt bondage.

It also says high recruitment fees often compel migrant workers to continue their job in efforts to earn back their initial investment. Female domestic helps find themselves in situations of forced labour or debt bondage and face restrictions on movements, non-payment of wages, threats and physical or sexual abuse.

According to Wikipedia, human trafficking is the fastest growing criminal industry in the world while the illegal arms industry and drug trade are in the second and third positions.

Among the South-Asian countries which export labour, Nepal and Pakistan enacted similar laws in 2007 and 2008.

Kamal Uddin Ahmed, also joint secretary of the home ministry, said the ministry kept provisions for strong legal structure and institutional arrangements in the draft to stamp out human trafficking and protect the victims.

The draft suggests that the special tribunals should have judges with the status of a session judge in a district. The trial of a case must be completed in 180 days.

While the proceedings of a case is going on, no compromise between the complainants and the offenders is allowed as the draft law con-

Hameem's factory. If the fire was caused by a short-circuit, then it would not spread so quickly, she said.

As the owner of the factory, Abul Kalam Azad, also the president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, had spoken against hartals recently, some vested quarter might have retaliated against him through carrying out an arson attack on his factory, she added.

She directed ministers and state ministers to remain alert in their constituencies along with the constituents in a bid to foil any "conspiracy".

The premier hinted that war criminals, Jamaat-e-Islami, militants, and recently arrested BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury's followers might resort to acts of sabotage to destabilise the country in an effort to hamper trials of war criminals.

One of the ministers said the militants are trying to destabilise the country in an effort to capture state power, and the people of all walks of life should remain alert about the ominous plot.

Hasina directed AL leaders and activists not to bring out anti-hartal processions on December 26, when BNP-Jamaat backed Sammilito Ulema Mashayeg Parishad Chairman Muhiuddin Khan called a hartal.

"Don't bring out anti-hartal marches and don't take to the streets to resist the pro-hartal supporters. If the hartal supporters violate law and order, the law enforcement agencies will take action," she said.

Don't back

FROM PAGE 20 municipality in consultation with the grassroots level leaders and workers.

"As ministers, you may easily back your brothers and relatives as candidates by using the police and administration. But remember, the party workers and voters might give you a harsh answer in that case," a minister quoted Hasina as saying.

Meanwhile, AL sources said the party this time would not back candidates as grand alliance's, as was done in the last parliamentary election.

Asked about it, AL presidium member and Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury told The Daily Star that they would support candidates from the allies too if they seem more qualified and likely to emerge victorious.

Insiders said Jatiya Party Chairman HM Ershad, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon and Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu are annoyed with AL for not yet deciding to back candidates as grand alliance's in many municipalities.

Talking to The Daily Star, Menon said AL has told them they want to settle on municipal candidates through a consensus locally. "We have asked them to resolve the matter through discussion at the central level," he said adding that AL might finalise its stance today.

Kazi Zafarullah, another AL presidium member, said there would not be any fixed number of municipalities to be shared with the allies. "If a candidate from an ally looks more promising in a given municipality, he will surely have our party's backing," he explained.

CNG station

FROM PAGE 1 stations would be brought down to four hours from today and from February 1, the period will be three hours.

He also said the owners withdrew the strike considering public suffering.

From today the CNG stations across the country will remain closed from 5:00pm to 9:00pm and from February 1 the closing time will be from 6:00pm to 9:00pm, he mentioned.

The earlier closing time was from 3:00pm to 9:00pm. In the meeting, State Minister Enamul, the power and energy secretary, Petro Bangla chairman, Titash Gas managing director and owners and leaders of the CNG refuelling stations were present.

On Saturday, the owners called an indefinite strike from December 21 since the government did not meet their demands.

Their seven-point demand included withdrawal of the government order for six-hour closure of the stations and reduction of the Energy Regulatory Commission's licence fee to Tk 5,000 from Tk 1 lakh.

Earlier, the association postponed their strike twice as the government sought time to consider their demands.

The government during last Ramadan requested the owners not to operate their stations for six hours to facilitate domestic use of gas, said Zakir Hossain Nayan, secretary general of the association.

The government is yet to withdraw its earlier decision causing loss to owners and suffering to consumers, he added.

SQ Chy

FROM PAGE 1 residence in the port city, the prosecutor noted.

If the BNP leader is allowed to move free, he might hamper the investigation and influence the witnesses, Tipoo said.

On December 16, law enforcers arrested the BNP standing committee member from Banani in connection with torching a car at Moghbazar on June 26. The arson left one person dead.

Salauddin's lawyer Fakhrul Islam wanted to submit two petitions before the tribunal.

One of the petitions states Justice Nizamul Huq and Justice ATM Fazle Kabir have no constitutional jurisdiction to hold the office of judge of the International Crimes Tribunal, since they are the judges of High Court division of the Supreme Court.

Another petition claimed the investigation agency's petition filed for the arrest of Salauddin had become ineffective since he was arrested on December 16 in a separate case.

The court, however, asked Fakhrul to submit the petitions through its registrar.

REMAND CONTINUES Deputy Commissioner Monirul Islam of Detective Branch said they continued grilling Salauddin, as no court order was served to end his remand.

BOAT CAPSIZE Death toll 37 as 2 more bodies found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

After recovering two more bodies yesterday from the Dhanu river in Jamalganj, the authorities declared the rescue operation finished at 2:00pm.

Of the total 37 deceased, 17 were women, 13 boys and seven girls.

A five-member probe committee, led by the Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Jamalganj Mohammad Abul Hashem, has been formed to investigate into the incident. The committee will submit the report within three days.

Amjad Hossain, station officer and also chief of a five-member diver team from Dhaka Fire Service and Civil Defence, said four divers conducted the rescue operation from 9:00am to 1:00pm yesterday within one kilometre area but no other body was found.

Contacted, the UNO told The Daily Star that 36 bodies were handed over to the family members while the body of an unidentified 10-year-old boy was handed over to the locals for burial at village Rampur.

The family members of the deceased from Itna and Mithamoin upazilas took the bodies to their villages, he added.

The UNO said in a primary investigation it seems the incident occurred as none of the passenger or cargo boat had lights. There was dense fog on Saturday night as well, he added.

Moreover, most of the passengers, travelling on the lower deck, were asleep and the windows of the boat were shut.

Both the boats are now kept at the banks of the Surma river.

According to the sources, Matiar Rahman alias Mati Miah, a former member of Fenarbak union parishad and Mohabbat Ali, a farmer from Alipur village took the first initiative to rescue the passengers just after the accident.

Mohabbat Ali also said that it was really a heart-breaking scene as mothers were searching for their babies in the night, and we were able to recover 35

bodies till mid night.

The deceased are Husna, 32, Sabbir, 7, Taslim, 12, Kakon, 10, Anuf, 28, and her son Akahs, 12, Jamela Khatun, 50, Ripon Khatun, 35, and her daughter Nasima Khatun, 10, Helena Khatun, 40, and her children Rafiqul Islam, 8, and Nima Akhtar, 7, Kakon Miah, 8, and his brother Touhid Miah, 6, all from village Matingaon under Itna upazila, while Sakid, 6, Siddik, 5, and his sisters Sithi, 5, and Eti, 1, hailing from village Bhora and Asma Begum, 10, of village Ghagra under Mithamoin upazila of Kishoreganj district.

Kidnappers

FROM PAGE 1 been working as an asphalt plant operator at Samwhan Corporation, a South Korean construction firm.

A gang of Afghan criminals attacked a camp of the company near Mazar-i-Sharif on Friday killing Altaf on the spot.

Nine construction workers managed the escape the attack while seven were taken hostage by the miscreants.

A foreign ministry press release yesterday said seventeen Bangladeshi workers had been working for the Korean company since 2004. They were later moved to work in Afghanistan.

Diplomatic sources said, Bangladesh has formally requested Afghanistan to help free the hostages and bring back the body of the deceased.

His body was brought to Kabul from Mazar-i-Sharif town, the crime scene, said officials of the Korean company in Dhaka.

The company has already requested the Afghan government to take initiatives to free the Bangladeshi hostages.

The ministry press release said the ministry contacted the company's Kabul office, and is constantly monitoring the situation.

Besides, the foreign ministry has directed the Bangladesh embassy in Uzbekistan to take necessary steps to rescue the victims and bring back the body of the slain Bangladeshi.

Summit assured

FROM PAGE 1 where investors are keen to invest in Summit's ventures, Aziz Khansaid.

Set to become the country's biggest power company, Summit has formed three entities to implement the six power projects, he added.

The projects will need investments of over \$ 1 billion. These are Bibiyana phase-1 and 2 gas-fired private power plants (341 MW each), Meghnaghat dual fuel 335 MW private power plant, Narayanganj 102 MW heavy fuel oil (HFO)-based rental plant, Khulna 115 MW HFO-fired rental plant and Noapara 40 MW HFO rental plant.

Summit won contracts for the large Bibiyana and Meghnaghat projects by beating other competitors through offering a very low tariff, while it won the rental power contracts on the basis of unsolicited negotiations like those of many other companies.

And it has also been declared the lowest bidder in competitive bids for two other HFO-based private power projects having a total production capacity of 150 MW in Syedpur and Shantahar.

Summit has also submitted offers in eight more private HFO projects in Dhaka, Chittagong, Kaliakoir, Madanganj and Khulna. These competitive tenders are now under evaluation.

Since Summit has been making winning offers and bagging one deal after another, industry insiders and even policymakers have raised questions if it has the financial and technical capability to accomplish such massive tasks.

"We fully appreciate and realise the depth of the issues including financing, implementation and subsequent management. This has been a dream come true," said Aziz. "But we are not dreaming. We are fully prepared to take up these tasks."

He said three Summit entities will implement three types of power projects. Summit Power Ltd will implement liquid fuel-based projects across the country, except in Khulna region. Kulna Power Company is implementing projects in Khulna and Noapara and other future projects in that region. And Summit Turbine Power Group will implement

Bibiyana-1, 2 and Meghnaghat projects.

"For the Turbine Projects, we have GE (US-based world's leading power company) as our co-investor, technology, operation and maintenance providers," he added.

"I believe everybody is certain that we can implement 100 MW projects as many as needed," Aziz said referring to his experience in power sector in the last 15 years. During this period, Summit has built a number of power plants generating 330 MW of power.

But implementing large projects is challenging, he said, and explained how he is tackling this challenge. "In addition to taking the world's largest equipment manufacturer GE on board, we have appointed German Lahmayer as the owner's engineer. It's the largest engineering company in the world. We are taking DFID, Mekong, Singapore, as our international legal counsel."

Summit is also set to appoint financial adviser for the projects. Besides, the company has appointed consultants to carry out environmental and social impact assessments, which are necessary for financing as well as for compliance with government rules.

"We are in the process of signing contracts on engineering, procurement and construction for these projects. We have short-listed one Indian and two Chinese companies. Lahmayer is assessing the capabilities of these companies for us," Aziz said.

"We are following a reductionist policy (in handling these projects) for reducing or making a complicated process into small simple process."

He mentioned that around 1,500 people will be working for these projects. Finally, Aziz Khan explained how his company managed to make the lowest power tariff offers in the tenders. To achieve low tariff, he said, Summit ensured most efficient technology at the most competitive prices. "I humbly put in 37 years of business experience, of which 15 years in power sector may have provided us some wisdom and connections to ascertain the market," he added.