

Hartal eve sees

FROM PAGE 1
Khaleda over the violence.
But Khaleda said cancellation of the airport project on Arial Beel is not enough to call off the hartal. Public sufferings like shortage of gas, water and electricity have to be resolved or more such programmes will be enforced, she said.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain has accused the government of trying to disrupt the hartal.

"We will go for non-stop hartal if the government tries to disrupt this hartal," he told a press conference at BNP's Naya Paltan office yesterday. "We will go for any programmes necessary to press home public demands."

Senior ruling Awami League lawmakers Tofail Ahmed and Suranjit Sengupta in parliament yesterday blasted BNP for calling the hartal terming it "unconstitutional and undemocratic".

Taking the floor on point of order, the two leaders accused BNP of trying to tarnish the country's image by calling such "illogical hartal without any issues".

CLASHES, VIOLENCE
Hartal supporters attacked and set fire to at least nine buses and a private car in Demra, Tongi, Farmgate, Mirpur, Kakrail and Shankar.

Mirpur police say they have detained Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal local unit joint secretary Awlad Hossain and Arif Hossain in this connection.

Meanwhile, the opposition leaders have decided to stay at 26 points in the city to make the hartal a success.

The party brought out processions and distributed leaflets drumming up support for the hartal, fourth since June last year.

BNP observed two other hartals in November over Khaleda's former house in cantonment and another in June last year.

Police and BNP activists yesterday locked into

clashes that left 17 people including former mayor Mujibur Rahman Sarwar injured, reports Sushanta Ghosh from Barisal.

Police picked up eight people from the spot.

The clashes occurred when the opposition supporters tried to hold rallies at Aswani Kumar Hall premises in support of hartal.

Police also charged batons to disburse a rally organised by another former mayor Ahsan Habib Kamal in court area.

Meantime, Rab arrested Khorsheed Alam, younger brother of DCC Ward-56 councillor Chowdhury Alam, at his Khilgaon residence with three hand bombs. Alam, also president of Ramna BNP unit, went missing in the capital on June 25 last year.

Police foiled pro-hartal processions in the port city as BNP activists locked into chase and counter chase with law-enforcers and damaged at least four vehicles, writes our staff correspondent in Chittagong.

BNP LAWMAKERS FORM HUMAN CHAIN

BNP lawmakers yesterday formed a human chain on the premises of the parliament demanding withdrawal of cases filed against Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia and others in connection with the proposed Bangabandhu International Airport at Arial Beel.

The opposition MPs lined up at the entrance of the parliament building in the morning for half an hour to voice their demand.

Addressing a rally after the human chain programme, Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Farroque alleged that the government is filing cases against the BNP chief and party leaders which are preventing them from returning to the parliament.

The government's activities proved it does not want to make the parliament effective with the presence

of opposition lawmakers, he alleged.

Asked when the opposition lawmakers will return to parliament, the opposition chief whip said they had planned to join the current session. But filing of the case obstructed them to go ahead with their plan, he alleged.

Among others, BNP lawmakers AKM Mosharaf Hossain, Zainul Abedin, ABM Ashraf Uddin Nizan, Shaheed Uddin Chowdhury Annie, Rasheda Begum Hira, Syeda Asifa Ashrafi Papiya and Nilufar Chowdhury Moni took part in the human chain.

Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami MP Hamidur Rahman also joined the human chain expressing his party's solidarity with the BNP's demand.

BUSINESS LEADERS
Business leaders yesterday heavily criticised today's hartal, reports BSS.

President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association Abdus Salam Murshedy said, "Hartal always brings negative impact for a country's economy and it can never be an instrument to realise demands of political parties."

President of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry Afif Ibrahim said the entire business community is against hartal.

Thai, Cambodian clashes resume at disputed border

AP, Bangkok

Fighting erupted yesterday between soldiers along Cambodia's disputed border with Thailand near an 11th century temple for a third day, shattering a shaky cease-fire.

A Cambodian soldier at the front line, Lt Pen Song, said troops exchanged artillery and mortar fire along the Phnom Troap mountain range, about 3 kilometers from the historic Preah Vihear temple, a UN World Heritage Site that belongs to Cambodia under a 1962 World Court ruling disputed by many Thais.

A Thai official in the border area, Nakorn Siripanyanant, confirmed that clashes had resumed yesterday evening and said some villagers who had returned to their homes were again evacuated.

There were no immediate reports of casualties or damage.

Babar

FROM PAGE 20
Chittagong court yesterday.

Faruk gave confessional statement under 164 before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Mahbubur Rahman.

Assistant Commissioner (Prosecution) Nirmalendu Bikash Chakrabarty said the magistrate recorded the eight-page statement from 3:00 to 4:30pm.

In his statement, Faruk, also the chief of the five-member probe body formed by the then BNP government, said they found involvement of National Security Intelligence (NSI) officials in the incident.

They informed Babar of the matter but he forbade them to mention it in the report, a source at the court said quoting Faruk's statement.

Faruk also mentioned about the investigation of the probe body and its report, the source said.

The former home secretary gave the statement as a witness of the case filed in connection with the haul of ten truckloads of firearms and ammunition at Chittagong Urea Fertiliser Company Ltd jetty on April 2, 2004.

Earlier three probe committee members -- the then DIG (Special Branch) Shamsul Islam, former DIG (CID) Farrukh Ahmed and former NSI Director Brig Gen Enamur Rahman -- implicated Babar and Omar Faruk for twisting the probe report in their confessional statement under section 164.

New cloud hovers

FROM PAGE 1
becoming costlier. And even a strong 41 percent export growth is not rendering much hope for the situation to calm down. Let's look at the reasons.

Last year, we had a total export of \$16.5 billion -- \$12.5 billion of it from readymade garments -- which can be expected to reach \$20 billion with last six months' export growth of 41 percent.

But remittance that fetched \$11 billion last year, and was expected to grow by 15 percent this year, has stagnated. And import is increasing fast and is expected to reach \$30 billion this year from \$22 billion last year.

"So the robust export growth may not be enough to arrest deficit in trade and current account balance," says Dr Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The surplus in current account balance has already shrunk from last year's, because of remittance and foreign aid fall. The surplus was \$1.67 billion last year. It has come down to \$0.56 billion now.

Contrarily, trade deficit has increased 30 percent

from \$2 billion last year (July-November) to \$2.75 billion this year.

So the strain has fallen on the overall balance, and foreign exchange reserves have come under pressure, as experienced in costly dollar.

The future does not look much brighter either. We have opted for costly energy with oil -- there was no option for cheap gas-based power plants as gas fields are depleting. So oil imports will increase fast in near future. So even after we have a big growth in export, import bill will also grow fast, putting inflationary pressure. Moreover, rising food prices probably mean slower world growth at a time when the recovery is still patchy.

"A major task for the government would be to strengthen and widen its safety net programme," says Dr Mustafiz. "Stocking up enough food to douse any fear of shortage will be important. The coming Boro rice production will be vital and supports have to be continued for good harvest. We know that farmers have already collected a good amount of seeds for Boro. And then prudent monetary policy has to be in place."

Army acted

FROM PAGE 20
The fierce clash on October 23 last year left 50 injured and three others missing. Mostafa Jamal Haidar, 26, who was bullet hit, died the following day.

Eight rights and environmental organisations -- ActionAid, Association for Land Reform and Development (ALRD), Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela), Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Manusher Jonno Foundation, Nijera Kori and Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) -- called the press conference at Brac Centre in the capital.

ASK Executive Director Sultana Kamal while reading out a written statement said the scheme had been undertaken on agricultural land, rural homesteads and flood plains, bypassing the approval process and environmental assessment.

The way the army had moved to implement the scheme was comparable with conventional land grabbing, said the former adviser to a caretaker government.

Jamal's father Md Abdur Rafiq at the press conference said, "The army at Tanmushuri camp killed my unarmed son; I demand justice."

He recounted the agony he underwent and how the local administration forced him to bury his son hurriedly.

He said police had refused to record his case over the death as he wanted it to be. They altered it eight times.

So far no trace of Saidul Islam, 18, Md Shamsher Ali, 28, and Abdul Alim Masud, 32, has been found since the October violence.

Thousands of agitating villagers on that day saw an army chopper lift bullet-hit Shamsher while Rab-1 members take Saidul and Masud, Abdur Rafiq added.

Asia Begum, mother of Abul Hossain, who suffered bullet injury in the incident, said her son would lose a hand if Tk 1.5 lakh is not

List of war

FROM PAGE 20
minister said preparation of such list is now under process.

The number of listed women freedom fighters is 162. There is no list of Biranganas, but steps will be taken to make a list in future, he said.

Each of 1.50 lakh freedom fighters is currently receiving monthly allowance of Tk2000, and the government wants to increase their allowance, the minister said adding, the government also plans to provide the allowance to all freedom fighters.

The state minister informed the House about the government's various measures for the welfare of the freedom fighters. Biranganas are women who have borne the brunt of brutality by the Pakistani army and their collaborators during the Liberation War.

managed for his operation.

Khushi Kabir, executive director of Nijera Kori, said they repeatedly wrote to the army chief to have an explanation on the issue but got no response.

Md Mostafa Mollah, father of Shamsher; Shahar Ali, father of Masud; and Lehazuddin, father of Saidur, were present at the conference.

Shahin Anam, executive director of Manusher Jonno; Farah Kabir, ActionAid executive director; Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Bela chief executive; and Iftekharuzzaman, TIB executive director, among others, were present.

Bigots foil

FROM PAGE 20
of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat gathered for the three-day annual convention.

Many of them broke down in tears hearing that they had to leave without taking part.

"Our democratic rights have been taken away due to threats from some madrasa people," said Mir Mobasher Ali, a member of the convention organising committee.

"But we are respectful to the law, so we have accepted the government's order," he said.

According to Mizanur Rahman, additional superintendent of police Gazipur, a group of disgruntled locals presented a memorandum to the district administration yesterday demanding that the permit for the convention be revoked.

The SP said Mawlana Mostafa, Mawlana Sharfuddin and Mufti Ataur Rahman were present among others.

The district administration revoked the permit. And when violence was imminent, the authorities decided to impose section-144 in two square kilometres surrounding the venue, he said.

Section-144 does not allow any kind of public gathering.

Thousands of people were stuck inside the venue after the declaration of section-144, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat leaders said.

Over 3,000 people coming from different parts of the country also had to return, they added.

According to Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat leaders, they rented Bahadurpur Scout Training Camp for three days. The location was picked since it was away from locality so problems with local religious bigots could be averted, they said.

The programme, usually held at their national headquarters in Bakhshibazar, was moved to Gazipur to accommodate more people.

For over a decade, followers of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jamaat have been facing abuse and aggression of religious bigots across the country. Many of their houses have been looted from time to time and some have even been killed.



New writers too excited

RAKIB AHAMMED

Jewel Ahsan Qamrul has flown all the way to Dhaka from Japan to be at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela. He was very excited to be part of the carnival and also to have his first book published for the fair.

"It's amazing. I waited for long to publish my first book on the occasion of the fair," said the young expatriate poet.

Like Jewel, many young writers wait all year round to bring out their books in this fair as they consider the event as a great occasion to reach thousands of booklovers.

Another young poet, Kowmodi Nargis is eagerly waiting for the Valentine's Day when her new book will come out in the fair.

"I consider the fair a blessing for the young authors like me," said another young poet Raju Islam who now passes several hours of his day on Bangla Academy premises as the first book of his life already hit the fair.

Eminent writer and columnist Syed Abul Maqsood said, "There is evidence in history of first work of a writer becoming masterpiece."

"The publishers should accept manuscripts of young authors with sympathy and publish the good ones," he told this correspondent in the fair on Saturday.

Faysal Ahmed Payel, owner of the Jayeta Publication, yesterday said they had released four new books of young writers at the book fiesta.



One of the new writers.

Rein back

FROM PAGE 20
conflicts and lack of coordination within it down to grass-roots level.

Criticising Commerce Minister Faruk Khan for failing to tackle price hike of essentials, the 14-party leaders demanded a meeting between them and the finance, food and commerce ministers immediately on this issue.

"We will give suggestions to the ministers on containing the price hike," Worker's Party President Rashed Khan Menon told this correspondent.

Another leader said although the government is distributing fair price cards among the poor, the allocation for this is inadequate to meet the needs.

The meeting observed that the prime minister takes many good decisions but those are not implemented.

It thanked Hasina for changing the decision to build an airport in Arial Beel.

Some of the leaders criticised PM's adviser HT Imam saying that bureaucratic tangles have badly affected government activities.

The alliance leaders demanded immediate start of the trial of war criminals and stressed mobilisation of public opinion in favour of this. To this end, the meeting decided to hold grand rallies in the divisional headquarters first and then in district towns.

They also demanded inclusion of 14-party leaders in the administrative committees at district and upazila levels to ensure coordination among them.

HC orders

FROM PAGE 20
The HC also ordered the director general of the Department of Environment to state whether the ship brought to Bangladesh for scrapping had obtained any environmental clearance.

The HC directives came during the hearing of the court's suo moto ruling on the incident.

Officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Police Station Nur Mohammad and Mak International Corporation owner Abul Kashem Master appeared before the HC in compliance with the court's order on January 19.

The HC in a ruling on January 19 asked the government to stop dismantling of ships in the country until further order after The Daily Star published a report the same day. The court directed the OC to explain why the police made delay in filing cases over the incident.

The OC told the court yesterday that an unnatural death case was filed on January 20 followed by another murder case on January 30 in connection with the incident.

The HC also turned down the offer of unconditional apology from Abul Kashem for the incident at his ship-breaking yard.

It rejected the pleas of both Nur Mohammad and Kashem for their exemption from appearing before the court.

The court fixed March 6 for further hearing on the ruling.

No respite

FROM PAGE 1
regard. I have informed them about those housing projects and they would soon take necessary measures," he added.

Though the government is legally obliged as well as pledge-bound to free the rivers from grabbers, this correspondent found no steps taken to that end while visiting the Turag and Tongi canal in Mirpur and Ashulia recently.

None of Al Tasauf Green View and Janani Housing Project could be contacted over the phone; only officials of Nasim Real Estate were available for comments.

Imam Hossain Nasim, managing director of the firm, said they have bought the land on the other side of the river.

"We had to buy the land along with parts of the river to make roads. But we will set up the project 600 feet away from the river," he added.

He admitted the project lacks approval, but said his firm has submitted an application to the Rajdhani Unnayan Karttripakkha, the body mandated to coordinate urban development in the capital.

Ismail Hossain Khokon, an employee of Nasim, said vessels ply through their project area during the monsoon.

Following a media campaign, the government in June 2009 pledged to preserve the wetland and protect the rivers, the lifeline of the capital. But since then it has done little to stop the encroachers.

According to the playground, open space and wetland protection law of 2000, filling up of any river or water body without permission is prohibited.

Rajuk sources say none of the housing projects in question has approval to build on these sites.

Graft charges

FROM PAGE 20
BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, in a case filed for amassing wealth illegally and concealing information in his wealth statement.

ACC Deputy Director Benazir Ahmed, investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, naming 12 witnesses.

The ACC on April 28 last year filed the case with Ramna Police Station after finding dissimilarities between what Eskandar owned and what his wealth statement showed.

According to the case, Eskandar in the wealth statement mentioned he had wealth worth Tk 99,10,266 whereas the ACC found it was worth Tk 5,71,87,074.

Eskandar got anticipatory bail from the High Court on May 3 last year.

One of those realtors mentions their Rajuk registration number (RD 0061) on the signboard, but that is not a proof of their project's approval.

The High Court has recently directed the government to take effective steps to stop earth-filling and advertisement or sale of plots by unauthorised private housing projects.

It identified 56 unauthorised projects and 418 mouzas where earth-filling has to be stopped. Most of those are big housing companies. Small companies, meanwhile, are mushrooming in the suburbs that are beyond the authorities' control.

"There's a huge wetland adjoining the Turag in Mirpur. So if you see earth-filling, it is not necessarily in the river. Maybe it's in a wetland by the river which is not in our jurisdiction," observed Syed Monowar Hossain, BIWTA secretary.

"We protect the rivers as per the river demarcation mentioned in the map," he added.

The wetland adjoining the Turag is shown in the Detailed Area Plan as flood flow zone.

Osman lands

FROM PAGE 20
to jail yesterday after he surrendered before a Narayanganj court.

Additional District and Sessions Judge Ali Akbar issued the order after rejecting his bail prayer.

Benjir Ahmed, deputy director of Anti-corruption Commission, Narayanganj, filed the cases during the last caretaker government against Shamim Osman for amassing illegal wealth and evading tax.

A Narayanganj court in September 2007 sentenced Shamim to the jail term in absentia. The court also ordered confiscation of his property.

Shamim reached the court premises by an ambulance yesterday around 10:00am and appeared before it with the bail prayer.

Shamim's lawyer advocate Anisur Rahman Dipu, also president of District Ainjibi Bar Association, told the court that his client was undergoing treatment at a hospital of the capital as he was suffering from heart and kidney complications.

Hearing the prayer, the court asked the jail authorities to maintain proper treatment as per the jail code.

Many corrupt lawmakers were convicted in absentia during the last caretaker government for concealing facts in wealth declaration and dodging tax. They are now getting bail though the court sent them behind bars after they surrendered before the court.

Police, post-mortem

FROM PAGE 1
They instead said she had sustained the injuries from falling.

The senior nurse added that Hena could not take food, so they had to feed her intravenously.

She then informed Dr Sultan Ahmed about her condition.

Dr Sultan told The Daily Star he found that the girl was physically assaulted and referred her to the surgical department of the hospital.

Head of the surgical department Dr Nirmal Chandra Das said the girl "almost recovered" from her injuries when relatives insisted on her release.

"We are under no compulsion to inform the law enforcers until a patient is dead in an assault case," said Dr Nirmal, also the residential medical officer, when asked why he had not informed the police.

On her release from the hospital on January 30, she had to be carried to a car, said Chhunnu Mia, Hena's brother-in-law.

"There was a tremendous pressure from some local influential people, including the union parishad member, to get Hena out of the hospital. Scared, the family asked for her release," said Chhunnu.

Dr Sultan, however, said the girl was not in a condition to be released.

Hena's father Darbesh Kha, a day-labourer, said he cannot describe how cruelly his daughter was tortured. "My 15-year-old child was brutally whipped."

Those giving her bath before burial also saw injury marks all over the body. Of them, her cousin Minu said there were bruises on her thighs, chest, lower abdomen and hands.

Minu, who had accompanied her to the hospital, said, "Hena broke down in tears and told me how Mahbub gagged her and raped."

The Daily Star talked to at least three witnesses to the whipping and a dozen others who saw the injuries Hena suffered from whipping on January 24.

The two forensic experts at Suhrawardi Medical

College and Hospital said external injuries might fade out in a week but it takes at least two weeks for the internal ones to disappear.

"The whipping must have severed blood vessels under the skin; there must have been signs of this under the skin. A proper post-mortem cannot fail to trace such injuries," said one of the experts requesting anonymity.

According to witnesses, Hena was whipped at least 50 times a day after she was raped allegedly by her 40-year-old cousin Mahbub and physically tortured by Mahbub's wife and in-laws on January 23.

The next day, Imam of local mosque Saifullah passed a fatwa for whipping the girl 101 times and Mahbub 200 times. He also fined Mahbub Tk 50,000.

The fatwa was given in a closed-door meeting, arranged by the family of Mahbub's wife Shilpi in collusion with Idris Sheikh, member of Chamta union parishad.

At one stage of the lashing, Hena collapsed to the ground, witnesses add.

Still, Idris and some others did not allow Hena's family to take her to hospital until January 25, when her condition worsened.

Following her death, police arrested four people -- Hafez Mofiz, Joynal Shikher, Ala Box, and Shilpi. Hafez Mofiz, Joynal Shikher made the confession before a magistrate court.

Police have yet to arrest the rest including the main culprit Mahbub, Saifullah, Idris and Monimala, who lashed Hena.

The Daily Star also found the case filed with Noria Police Station inconsistent with the incident described by the victim's family members. In the case, the place of occurrence has been wrongly recorded.

The deputy commissioner of Shariatpur said the matter did not come to their notice, as the victim and the perpetrators are close relatives who tried to settle it among themselves.