

Hassle

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Sarani around 8:45pm.
No casualties were reported.

Meanwhile, in an unprecedented measure, mobile courts sentenced at least 52 pickets to imprisonment between one and three months for obstructing police in their duty and damaging property in the city.

Additional Deputy Commissioner Masudur Rahman of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said 16 pickets were given three-month imprisonment each in Ramna area.

Thirteen in Adabar, ten in Mohammadpur, and 13 others in Tejgaon, Mirpur, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Rampura, Sabujbagh and Shahbagh were given one month imprisonment.

Dhaka District Deputy Commissioner Mohibul Haque told The Daily Star that executive magistrates led the mobile courts which convicted the hooligans.

Replying to a query, the Dhaka DC said, "The magistrates delivered the verdicts considering the offences and not because of the upcoming hartal."

Hundreds of pickets were also rounded up by police for their alleged involvement in pre-hartal violence.

Top officials of the DC office and the police said the spot conviction of pickets by mobile courts is a new addition.

On Friday, main opposition BNP and its key ally Jamaat-e-Islami called for the hartal demanding continuation of caretaker government system and protesting the recommendations of the parliamentary special committee on constitutional amendment.

Addressing a press briefing at party's central office in the capital, BNP acting Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir alleged that over 100 opposition men were arrested until yesterday afternoon. He claimed that police started raiding homes of BNP men across the country.

He warned the government of reprisal if it tries to suppress opposition men during hartal.

Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandaker told journalists that police have been directed to take tough actions against people creating anarchy during hartal.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Sarak Paribahan Samity in an emergency meeting decided to run buses in the capital and its adjacent areas during the hartal. Leaders of the association in a press release criticised the opposition for calling for another hartal when one was enforced only a week ago.

Joybanga Sangskritik Oikya Jote and Jatiya Rickshaw-Van Samik League in separate press releases criticised BNP and its allies for putting people into suffering.

Libya returnees

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programme soon," she told The Daily Star on Friday.

Since the Libyan civil war broke out late February, over 36,000 Bangladeshis have returned home with the assistance of International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the government.

Brac, the world's largest non-government organisation, working in 17 districts under the safe migration project, has created a database of 10,800 returnees.

From them, one hundred most needy people have been selected for a loan of maximum Tk 10,000 each, said another Brac official.

Shipa said the money would be lent to the returnees to help them start small businesses or enterprises. Condition for the loan will be flexible and interest rates will be low, she said.

She said the project will benefit only a few hundred. The government, private sector and other organisations should come up to help them, as a majority of the returnees are broke and indebted.

With a loan of \$40 million from World Bank, the government has planned to give the returnees a grant of Tk 50,000 each. But the money handover is yet to start.

Now, the IOM and the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) are verifying the names of the returnees. BMET officials said the money handover will start in a month through banks.

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) earlier pledged a fund for the rehabilitation of the repatriated citizens. But it has yet to do anything about the issue.

Muhith slates

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rubbish," he said at a meeting at the BBS auditorium held in memory of late Dr AKM Golam Rabbani, the former Director General of BBS. Statistics Division, BBS and Bangladesh Statistical Association jointly organised the meeting.

Muhith said like the World Bank, CPD also put forward their opinion about various aspects of the economy, but the CPD predictions proved to be incorrect in most cases.

Earlier on June 5 while commenting on the CPD's challenge about the authenticity of The BBS projection, Muhith called it "Rubbish, totally rubbish."

He also said, "If CPD has said so...it's very bad, extremely unjust and very much politically motivated."

The CPD at a press briefing on June 4 commented that the growth could be 6.2-6.3 percent, not 6.7 percent as estimated by BBS for the outgoing fiscal year.

The CPD also said the BBS estimate could misguide the policy makers, affect the government credibility and make people dub it as a political score.

Citing some sorts of insin-

cerity in the system of BBS, Muhith urged the ministry officials to make progress on the issue.

Planning Minister AK Khandker, BBS Director General M Shahjahan Ali Molla, former Bangladesh Bank Governor Dr Farashuddin Ahmed, former Jahangirnagar University vice chancellor Kazi Saleh Ahmed and late Dr Rabbani's wife and colleagues spoke on the occasion chaired by statistics division secretary Riti Ibrahim.

Recalling the contributions of Dr Rabbani, the finance minister said Dr Rabbani ensured the independence of BBS.

AK Khandker said the current BBS has now come to such a place because of the contribution of Dr Rabbani. "If we want to pay tribute to him (Rabbani), we'll have to take BBS to a higher place."

Riti Ibrahim said a unified source of statistics would be built through the BBS. There would be offices of BBS in each district as part of its strengthening process.

Dr AKM Golam Rabbani, former director general of BBS, died at his residence on June 4 at the age of 80.

Same old sad story

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About three kilometres away at Mandail in Keraniganj, a namesake of Shakil works at a rope factory. He runs almost incessantly between pillars, each 33 feet apart, carrying jute fibre strings from a spinning wheel to another.

The three boys joined their work less than a week ago. Where their daily wages range between Tk 35 to 100, safety measures like gloves, helmet and masks are a far cry there.

Most children working in these small workshops or factories did not even have the chance of schooling. Many have been taken out the schools by their parents and set to work and earn for the family.

According to a Unicef report, around 3.7 million children are directly involved in hazardous labour in Bangladesh. Of them, a staggering 3.3 million are growing up in ghettos like Kamrangirchar and Keraniganj. They are considered as the most vulnerable in terms of healthcare and education.

"These working children have no childhood. The government and political parties must adopt a pragmatic approach to ensure them the maximum opportunity and protection from violation of rights with whatever limited resources we have," said Sultana Kamal, executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra.

The Unicef data say nearly half the country's population are children, aged below 18

years, and half of them live under poverty which force them to forget or leave school and take up jobs.

As we thrive to become a middle-income nation by 2050, an estimated 80 million more children are likely to join the underprivileged mass or working groups.

"This is unfortunate that none of your leaders realises the gravity of the situation. Bangladesh is a country having no mentionable mineral resources. The only resource it has is the people. The government must invest on children to maximise their potential or else these children will become a huge liability," said Unicef Country Director Carel De Rooy.

Rooy remembers the sad spectacle of what becomes of those children who grow up abandoned. While growing up in Brazil he saw how denial to a dignified life turned generations of children into criminals only in four decades. Brazil has become a heaven for drug peddlers and gun runners.

The picture is not much different in Mexico, Nigeria, Senegal and Kenya.

The government over the years allocated up to only 17 percent of the social safety budget and 25 percent of the Annual Development programme for children.

A recent Unicef study has shown that only 2.5 percent increase in the allocation for children in national budget for a 10-year period can alter the life of vulnerable children to a great extent.

Indian journo shot dead

Investigative reporting seen as reason behind murder

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

A senior journalist with an English tabloid daily, who extensively covered crime and underworld in India's financial capital Mumbai for over two decades, was shot dead by four unidentified persons yesterday.

Jyoti Dey, 56, editor (Special Investigation) of Mid-Day, was fired at from point blank at Powai locality around 3:30pm, said Mumbai Joint Police Commissioner (Law and Order) Rajnish Seth.

According to Additional Police Commissioner Vishwas Nagre Patil, four persons riding two bikes fired five rounds at Dey, who was also on a bike, from behind.

He was rushed to a nearby hospital where the doctors declared him dead, Patil said, adding that the shooters had escaped the scene.

Maharashtra Home Minister R R Patil said police would soon come to know who were behind the killing. He said Dey never complained about anyone.

Maharashtra Public Works

Minister Chhagan Bhujbal said the journalist did not 'target' any gang or mafia in particular.

Asked if the killing could be linked to elements from the underworld or the oil mafia, former home minister Bhujbal said, "Dey was a very honest person. He used to write on the underworld. He was not targeting anyone in particular, whether any gang or any (oil) mafia."

Meanwhile, police sources said Dey, who recently ran a series of news reports on oil mafia, had received threats from anti-social elements.

Sachin Kalbaug, executive editor of Mid-Day, said, "It is too early to say why this has happened and how it happened. No indications that he was working on a big story which would have made anyone uncomfortable."

"Yes, he has broken big stories all his life. However, it is not for me to speculate, I can tell you that he was not working on any big story," he said.

Dey has worked with major newspapers including the Indian Express and Hindustan Times.



Tortoises seized at Thailand's Suvarnabhumi International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Two French soldiers killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Paris

Two French soldiers were killed and a third was seriously injured in Afghanistan Friday in two separate accidents, Defence Minister Gerard Longuet said in a statement.

A flight lieutenant died of his injuries after a Gazelle helicopter came down late Friday about 20 kilometres from Bagram in the north of the country in difficult weather conditions, said the statement. The pilot was seriously injured in the crash.

Also Friday, a corporal fatally injured himself with his own weapon while travelling in an armoured vehicle back to Tagab base, in the northeast, after a mission.

An inquiry had been launched into the "circumstances of the accident", said the statement.

10 more

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30, Mamun Hossain, 15, Hashi Khatun, 24, Nasima Khatun, 25, Meem, 10, Hamida, 50 and Banyan, 10, -- are the residents of Kenai village in the upazila.

A health team of Faridpur Upazila Health Complex led by Dr Md Khalilur Rahman, upazila health and family planning officer, visited the village yesterday and confirmed the disease. They also provided free treatment to them.

Dr Khalil suspected that victims have been infected by anthrax as they slaughtered a sick cow and distributed the meat on June 9.

Talking to the patients we have become convinced that they contracted the disease from the cow, he added.

Earlier 17 people were infected with anthrax at Raut Nagdapara village of the same upazila from May 30 to June 8.

Husband

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on request of the victim's family. The family members also declined to comment on the incident at the moment.

Sources said Sumon, owner of a brick kiln, beat up his wife following a quarrel.

Meanwhile, the husband had threatened to kill their only son if his in-laws moved for legal action.

The family, however, lodged a case with the Dhanmondi Police Station on June 6.

Sumon is now absconding.

Friend of the victim Zobaidda Nasreen, teacher of DU anthropology department, told The Daily Star that Sumon was bad tempered and used to torture his wife since they got married in 2002.

The victim is now undergoing treatment at LabAid Hospital under police guard. Her family is planning to send her abroad for better treatment, said Zobaidda.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, chairman of National Human Rights Commission, visited the victim at the hospital on Friday.

Mangrove forest plundered

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must be completed after floating a tender in the media.

The 20,000-acre (about the size of 18,200 football fields) man-made mangrove forest is one of the prides of the forest department. Forest officials said that if the road is built, illegal logging and poaching would increase overnight. The wildlife would face severe threat and most importantly, the bio diversity of the area would be at stake.

The road would also jeopardise Bangladesh's commitment to the international community to fight global warming. The country's forest cover has alarmingly shrunk to less than 10 percent of land mass with only 0.02 hectares of per capita forest land, one of the lowest in the world.

In 2010, the High Court issued an injunction on the Char Kukrimukri road project after the Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) filed a writ petition. On Wednesday afternoon (June 8), just after the judgement was verbally passed by the High Court bench, some local people in Charkukrimukri announced over the loudspeakers in the name of the local lawmaker that the road

project would go ahead.

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of BELA, said that the cutting of trees is a direct defiance to the High Court judgement.

"The judgement required compliance with the provisions of Environment conservation Act 1995 and the Forest Act 1912 while constructing the road," Rizwana said, "Such hurried implementation is clearly malafide and against public interest," she added.

At around noon on Friday, our correspondent found labourers working to construct the earthen road. Nearby, several hundred people with axes in hand were indiscriminately cutting down the trees.

Divisional Forest Officer in Bhola Sayed Ali told The Daily Star that the road would destroy the mangrove forest and make the area most vulnerable to natural disasters.

"We have officially sought help from the police and the magistracy but nothing has been done to stop the felling of the trees," Sayed said.

"Following Wednesday's announcement over loudspeaker in the area, we tried to file a General Diary (GD) with the Char Fashion police station but the police were dilly dallying with recording

the GD," Sayed said. "Till today, they (police) have not given us the GD number," he added.

Hashem Mohajon, an aspiring chairman of the area, widely known as the local lawmaker's own man and also leading an influential group in the area said that enthusiastic local people started felling the trees and construction of the road.

"The process of floating the tender is now underway. I am not involved with the matter though," he said. As soon as he finished talking to this correspondent, Hasem Mohajon with his men, started cutting down the trees.

Nur-e-Alam, Upazila Nirbahi Officer of Char Fashion said that after he was informed a team visited the spot on June 9 and forbid the locals from cutting the trees without permission.

"But I could not do anything else, but the forest department can always prosecute those people who are involved in plundering its forest," He added.

Despite repeated attempts throughout yesterday Abdullah Al Islam alias Jacob, lawmaker for Bhola-4 (Charfashion) could not be reached for his comment.

It's our fight for existence

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saying at a closed-door meeting at her Gulshan office in the capital on Thursday night.

She gave a set of directives and suggestions before the party finalised its decision on a countrywide 36-hour hartal from today.

Khaleda shared her views about the anti-government movement with mid-level leaders including presidents and general secretaries of the party's front and associate bodies.

The leader of the opposition in parliament told them they do not need to take to the streets during the hartal as a large number of police and ruling party cadres will be there to resist the opposition programme. So, the government's action will be enough to make the hartal successful, she added.

Khaleda asked the leaders

to organise party workers to boost the organisational strength, and avoid attack and arrest by law enforcers.

She also held her first meeting with leaders of the newly formed Dhaka city committee of BNP on Thursday night and made same suggestions.

"It's our fight for existence. There is no scope for compromise. So, get ready for a long-term movement," sources quoted Khaleda as saying at the meeting.

Party insiders said the chairperson decided to call hartal one after another if the caretaker government system is scrapped from the constitution. Even 48-hour and 72-hour-long hartal may be announced.

"Last hartal [on June 5] was successful as people's support was spontaneous and that proves people expect more hartals to protect the

caretaker system," Khaleda said.

This government lost public support a long time ago, and the opposition has to capitalise on the situation by standing beside people, she added.

The general secretary of a front organisation of the main opposition BNP said, "Madam [Khaleda] seemed determined about the agitation. We were there (the meeting with her) for a short time but within that time she repeatedly referred to 1990s mass upsurge and asked us to prepare for such a movement."

Parties in the BNP-led opposition have already expressed support for the agitation aimed to build a mass upsurge against the ruling Awami League, said party sources.

Chavez undergoes surgery in Cuba

AFP, Caracas

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez underwent surgery in Cuba on Friday to treat an abscess in his pelvic area and is recovering, Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro said.

According to Maduro, the surgery was performed early Friday in Havana and had "satisfactory results for the health" of the Venezuelan leader, who had already "begun the recovery process."

Chavez has been on an official visit to Cuba since Wednesday.

Tortoises seized

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over a week and officials believe the same gang was behind both incidents.

"These consecutive seizures highlight the continuing high volume illicit wildlife trade link between South and Southeast Asia... If we can't stop (smugglers), we'll lose these species forever," said Freeland senior programme officer Onkuri Majumdar.

Last September Thailand -- home to some of the world's largest wildlife trafficking operations -- seized more than 1,000 star tortoises that were smuggled into the country on a flight from Bangladesh.

"These beautiful animals are destined for Chatuchak market and would have become the pets of well-to-do people," said the customs official, referring to a huge market in Bangkok notorious for openly selling endangered species.

Economy

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employment opportunities for the unemployed, the business community observed.

Opposing enforcement of shutdowns, the business community said such programmes not only hampers growth of domestic economy but also discourages foreign direct investment, which is badly needed at this moment.

Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry President AK Azad said the business community observes the political leaders should go to parliament and solve their problems instead of imposing hartal.

"Hartal will hamper the overall economy. We are against it. The issue of the caretaker government should be solved in parliament," he said.

Amjad Khan Chowdhury, president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said businessmen oppose hartal as such programmes disrupt the economy badly.

"We have plenty of problems to be solved. We have to achieve the development target and solve the traffic jam, while we have the problems of unemployment. We have to solve these issues," he said.

Politics should lead the economy, but the hartal programmes will only damage it, he added. "Politics should be for the betterment of the economy," he observed.

The Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry also voiced strong concern on the opposition-called two-day hartal from today, saying the shutdown will have immense adverse impact on the overall economic activities.

"The DCCI feels that the two-day strike will have immense adverse effect on the country's overall economic activities," it said. "As a trade body, with the largest number of SME representatives, we feel that this sort of strikes will badly hamper the industry," said a statement issued by the DCCI.

AKM Salim Osman, president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, also said businessmen never support hartal as it only damages the economy. "If the issue of hartal is logical, everybody agrees with such programme. But the hartal is issueless and illogical."

He said the contract workers would be the worst victims of hartal, as they will not be able to earn the money during the shutdown.

President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association Shafiqul Islam Mohiuddin said economy cannot run without politics; the political leaders should not enforce any programme that would destroy the economy.

He said general trend is that consumption of apparel items is declining worldwide for higher prices of fuel, cotton and a decline in people's purchasing capacity following the recession in the western world.

As a result, the apparel businessmen have to be very cautious now, he said. "So, we should not enforce any damaging programmes now. The production and export of garment items will be hampered because of programmes like hartal," he said.