

## Sangram editor

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with Monday's clash between law enforcers and Jamaat-e-Islami men in Dhaka and elsewhere.

Lt Col Rafiqul Islam, commanding officer of Rab-3, told The Daily Star that they arrested him from his Moghobazar residence in the capital on charges of "patronising the violence."

He said that they have other intelligence on him, but declined to specify.

On Monday, several hundred Jamaat activists fought pitched battles with police in the capital, leaving at least 100 people injured and halting traffic for hours. The clash erupted after the law enforcers obstructed a Jamaat rally demanding release of their top leaders who are behind bars on war crimes charges.

Police said they arrested around 450 leaders and activists of Jamaat and Shibir, which is Jamaat's student wing, from across the country in this connection. In Dhaka, 261 Jamaat men including acting secretary general ATM Azharul Islam and Publicity Secretary Tasneem Alam were detained.

During the clashes, the Jamaat men set fire to at least 28 vehicles, smashed around 200 others and vandalised dozens of roadside shops, policemen said.

Sporadic clashes took place also in other parts of the country.

Following the incident, at least 20 cases were filed, including nine in capital's Ramna and Paltan Police Stations, accusing several thousand Jamaat men for torching and damaging vehicles, destroying public properties and attacking policemen.

Monirul Islam, deputy police commissioner of Detective Branch (south division), told journalists yesterday that Jamaat-Shibir men were trying to create instability in the country to obstruct the war crimes trial.

Meanwhile, the Jamaat-Shibir men arrested in Dhaka were placed on remand for 19 days in four cases filed by Ramna and Paltan police against some 2,500 to 3,000 Jamaat men.

Paltan police were granted 10 days for questioning 183 of the 261 arrestees in two cases while Ramna police were given nine days to grill 168 in two other cases.

A number of detainees were shown arrested by both Ramna and Paltan police.

Five cases were filed with Ramna Police Station by the owners of five damaged vehicles.

Meanwhile, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir in separate statements condemned the arrest of Abul Asad and demanded his immediate release.

Leaders of Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ) and Dhaka Union of Journalists also protested Asad's arrest. They also held a rally at Jatiya Press Club demanding his release.

Also yesterday, Home Minister Sahara Khatun said the Jamaat-Shibir men injured 40 policemen. She added that the Jamaat activists were trying to create anarchy in the country.

Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif alleged the main opposition BNP was involved in the attack on law enforcers.

"Khaleda Zia did not denounce the attack on police. She rather protested the police obstruction of Jamaat procession, which proves that the party was involved in the violence," Hanif told a rally at Bangabandhu Avenue.

Jamaat's Assistant Publicity Secretary Matiur Rahman Akond claimed more than 700 leaders and activists were arrested from across the country in the last two days.

Our district correspondents reported 11 arrests in Rajshahi, two in Chapainawabganj, 10 in Mymensingh, 10 in Narsingdi, 12 in Maulvibazar and 10 in Netrokona.

UNB reports: 23 Jamaat-Shibir men were arrested in Chittagong, seven in Rajbari, five in Sherpur, five in Narayanganj, four in Bogra, 16 in Noakhali, four in Brahmanbaria, five in Meherpur, four in Khulna and eight in Kurigram.

Chittagong police filed a case accusing around 3,000 Jamaat-Shibir leaders and workers for vandalism and attack on police, UNB adds.

## PM pushes

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helps improve child health and education as well as overall socio-economic situation.

She urged the US business community to invest more in Bangladesh in the fields of energy, power, manufacturing, insurance, banking and services, agriculture, food processing, shipbuilding, renewable energy, tourism, ICT goods and services, high value garments, pharmaceuticals and ceramics.

"My government will do its utmost to guarantee that you are comfortable with your businesses in Bangladesh. Your presence in Bangladesh is to our mutual benefit, providing profitable gains and prosperity," she said.

The premier said the presence of low-cost workforce, strategic location, and a positive investment climate lauded by world's leading consulting firms, create a "win-win" situation both for investors and Bangladesh.

In this setting, she said US investment could play a very important role by fulfilling the demands in a host of areas, including power and energy.

Hasina said the Asia Society's recent report on Enhancing Trade and Investment between Bangladesh and the United States demonstrates their sincere desire to improve trade relations with Bangladesh.

The US Chamber of Commerce is also playing a highly commendable role in deepening Bangladesh's commercial ties with the United States, she said.

Hasina said despite the recent world recession, Bangladesh's GDP growth rate averaged at 6 percent. "Our export basket has been widening and the Export/GDP ratio continues to rise."

The prime minister said Bangladesh's industrial growth averaged at 8 percent; services grew at 6 percent; and agriculture maintained growth around 4 percent.

"Now 90% of our annual public expenditure comes from domestic sources... Today, Bangladesh is a lucrative destination for foreign investment," she said.

Hasina noted that strate-

gically located between South and South East Asia, close to India and China, Bangladesh is becoming a regionaleconomic hub.

"Once our policy of opening up roads, railways, waterways and air to our neighbours is fully implemented, Bangladesh will become a bustling centre of economic activity," she said.

"Moreover, the duty-and quota-free access of our products to the European Union, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and other developed countries provides a competitive edge to investors in Bangladesh," the premier said.

Hasina said Bangladesh has several investment-friendly policies which include equal treatment for local and foreign investors, legal protection against nationalisation and expropriation, and guarantee for repatriation of capital and dividend.

The premier said Bangladesh has adopted a Public-Private-Partnership Policy to build infrastructures such as highways, mono-rail, railroads, power stations, and a deep-seaport as well as a world class international airport.

Hasina referred to Citi Investment Research & Analysis of Citigroup, which in its global Economic Review in February 2011, ranked Bangladesh as one of the 3G countries expected to deliver high growth and profitable investment opportunities.

Moreover, she said, Goldman Sachs has placed Bangladesh in its list of "Next Eleven"; J P Morgan in its "Frontier Five"; while Standard & Poor's, and Moody's list Bangladesh ahead of all other South Asian countries, apart from India.

Emphasising on further strengthening ties between Bangladesh and USA, the premier said she is pleased to be partnering in President Obama's initiatives on global health, food security, climate change and engagement with Muslim communities.

US business community leaders joined the luncheon, where Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Ambassador at-Large M Ziauddin, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad and FBCCI President A K Azad were also present.

## EU grants

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assistance, nutritional care, clean drinking water, shelter, sanitation facilities and access to healthcare services to those who have lost their homes and livelihoods, said a press release of the European Union yesterday.

Kristalina Georgieva, the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response, said "The humanitarian situation is dire in Bangladesh. Hundreds of thousands of people are uprooted from their homes by the latest deluge.

"They are now living in appalling conditions in makeshift shelters or under the open sky. Europe's solidarity is called for, so the commission will help fund the immediate needs of the most vulnerable among the affected. As usual, our relief activities also include disaster risk reduction—an indispensable priority in such a disaster-prone country."

The commission will continue to monitor the evolution of the humanitarian emergency through its team in Bangladesh, while keeping in close contact with the partner relief organisations through which the funding will reach the beneficiaries.

A recent field assessment carried out by the EC confirmed the substantial destruction inflicted on houses and essential sources of livelihood. There has been significant loss of crops, livestock and fish ponds, on which millions of Bangladeshis rely for their sustenance and income.

The floods have affected around one million Bangladeshis so far, according to official estimates. Over 200,000 people have fled their homes, forced to seek refuge elsewhere. Most of the flooded areas are expected to remain waterlogged for several months, which will have significant and protracted impact on the people living along the river basins.

## Mushfiqur

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The decision to appoint the Bogra-born wicketkeeper as the captain comes just a fortnight after they sacked Shakib Al Hasan as skipper on September 5 in an abrupt move which took everyone by surprise. Of course it drew flak from all quarters but since that day two weeks ago, the discussion centred on the possible new captain with Mushfiqur and Riyad leading the pack.

Mushfiqur, who has played 24 Tests and 98 ODIs after famously making his Test debut at the age of 16 at Lord's against England in 2005, won the leadership mainly because of being an automatic name on the team-sheet after Tamim and Shakib. After a horrendous World Cup earlier this year, the 23-year-old answered his critics with a cracking half-century against Australia in April before showing fine form on tour to Zimbabwe when his disciplined batting was exemplary in every condition.

After beginning to play ODI cricket in 2006, he took a long time to nail down a regular spot after Dhiman Ghosh was in the running during 2007-08. A dependable batsman in the Tigers' middle-order, Mushfiqur was thrust into the role of the first-choice wicketkeeper during the 2007 World Cup when he took over Khaled Mashud's spot. It sparked huge controversy but the nuggetty fighter blended in well and played a cracking half-century in the famous win over India.

In his instant reaction, Mushfiqur said, "This is the ultimate honour for any cricketer. I thank the Board for entrusting me with this responsibility."

"I am fully aware of the expectations of the entire nation and I will be totally committed towards ensuring that the Bangladesh Team strives towards fulfilling the dream of millions," he added.

BCB media committee chairman Jalal Yunus, who made the announcement, said it was an undisputed call made by the cricket board. "This was a unanimous decision of the board. The BCB president and chairman of cricket operations committee Enayet Hossain Siraj have spoken to both cricketers and they have accepted the roles," said Yunus.

## Biodiversity issue

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drastically in 1975 resulting in a rise in salinity in the Sundarbans after the construction of the Farakka barrage in 1973.

Mentioning salinity as a major threat to biodiversity in the Sundarbans, Nishat, vice chancellor of Brac University, said this type of agreement cannot ignore the issue of salinity.

Asif Nazrul, an expert on water treaty, said, "The main issue regarding the Sundarbans should be adequate flow of water in rivers and canals. If India follows the convention, it should not disturb the natural flow of trans-boundary rivers."

But the convention's main spirit is absent in the agreement on conservation of the Sundarbans, a freshwater mangrove forest, he said.

The environment and forest ministry in its initial draft of the agreement on biodiversity mentioned the issue of ensuring flow of freshwater in the Sundarbans to protect its biodiversity, said a high-up of the ministry, preferring anonymity.

"But the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forest did not agree with the clause saying it is not in their jurisdiction," said the official.

"They said if the clause is kept, the Indian Ministry of Water Resources has to be engaged in the process. In that case, it will take a longer time to reach a consensus over the issue."

It is very crucial to conserve the biodiversity of the Sundarbans, as it is a transitional zone between freshwater from rivers and saline water of the Bay of Bengal, say experts.

The Sundarbans that stretches over an area of 10,000 square kilometres in the two countries is the habitat for more than 600 Royal Bengal Tigers. There have been reports that the tigers are being affected by rising salinity in water in the forest.

According to a report, nearly 20 million Sundari trees suffer from top dying—a disease resulted from increased salinity in water.

Some experts say Royal Bengal Tigers suffer from various diseases for drinking saline water. It has also caused a change in their behaviour.

Prof Anwarul Islam, coordinator of the Sundarbans Tiger Project in Bangladesh, said it should be studied properly how increasing salinity has been affecting Tigers in the mangrove forest.

"There is no detailed study on impacts of salinity on tigers. We should conduct a detailed study on this," he said.

But the issue was left out of the recent agreement "Conservation of the Royal Bengal Tiger of the Sundarbans" that talks of exchange of forest personnel between the two countries for training and education

purposes.

Officials say the deal would create scope for joint projects on scientific research on tigers and the Sundarbans ecosystem.

They say the agreement on conservation of Royal Bengal Tigers could help check poachers and illegal wildlife trade in the Sundarbans.

Forest officials said the protocol would ensure engagement of paramilitary border guards of the two countries in the protection of tigers and wildlife.

Poachers have been on the prowl for tigers in the Sundarbans for increasing demand for tiger flesh and bone that are believed to have medicinal properties.

According to the tenets of Chinese medicine, not only the skin but almost all parts of a tiger have medicinal properties.

In July, three poachers were arrested with four deer heads and 60 kilograms of venison in Bagerhat. They confessed to trading tiger hides.

On February 17, forest officials arrested a poacher with four tiger skulls, 138 bones and hides of three tigers in Bagerhat.

In 2009, Rab seized a tiger hide and arrested three people in Khulna.

At least 29 tigers have been beaten to death by locals since 2000 while some were found dead in the Sundarbans, show records of the forest department.

## Hartal called for tomorrow

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tomorrow's hartal through separate statements. A few other political parties and organisations also protested the price hike of fuel and urged the government to withdraw its decision, considering the impact it is having on the people.

On Sunday, the government raised prices of diesel, kerosene, petrol and octane by Tk 5 a litre, and off furnace oil by Tk 8, with effect from Sunday midnight. The price of compressed natural gas (CNG) was also raised a day later by Tk 5 per unit with effect from Monday midnight.

BNP late Monday night decided to call for the hartal in an emergency meeting with its chief Khaleda Zia in chair at her Gulshan office.

Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, acting secretary general of BNP, made the call for the hartal during a media briefing at its central office yesterday.

"The government increased fuel prices for the third time which is nothing but a joke to the people as the fuel price is already beyond their purchasing capacity," Mirza Alamgir said, adding that price of CNG has increased 20 percent after just 60 days.

Replying to a query, Alamgir said it was the police not Jamaat men who were responsible for Monday's clashes and demanded release of arrested Jamaat leaders including its Secretary General ATM

Azharul Islam.

BNP leaders Tariqul Islam, Aman Ullah Aman, Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu were present at the media briefing.

Meanwhile, Jamaat acting Amir Maqbul Ahmed called for the hartal through a statement. He demanded release of its leaders and protested the price hike of fuel.

Asked why the party announcement was made by a statement, a Jamaat office assistant told The Daily Star that after Monday night's crackdown on Jamaat men, they are not in a position to hold any press conference.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party President Andaleev Rahman Partho and Secretary General Shamim Al Mamun in a joint statement urged the country to observe the hartal tomorrow.

Islami Oikya Jote also expressed solidarity towards tomorrow's hartal in a press release yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal held a rally and brought out procession yesterday demanding withdrawal of the new fuel prices while Sramik Kormochari Oikya Parishad leaders in a joint statement urged the government to reconsider its decision as fuel prices were increased only three months ago.

BNP and its political partners had called for har-

tals on July 6, 7 and 8 demanding the cancellation of the 15th constitutional amendment and reinstatement of the caretaker government system. Their first general strike programme was held on June 27, 2010 after the Awami League led government assumed power in January 2009.

**HOME MINISTER ON HARTAL**

Home Minister Shahara Khatun yesterday said the government will tolerate anarchy in the name of hartal no more and will go tough on picketers.

She said Jamaat-e-Islami cadres on Monday attacked and injured 40 policemen and torched vehicles as they were trying to push the country into anarchy.

"BNP is abusing the democratic tool like hartal only to foil the trials of war crimes, 10-truck arms haul case, August 21 grenade attack case and to save Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman," she said after attending a programme.

Meanwhile, Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif yesterday alleged that the main opposition BNP called for the hartal to hinder the trial of crimes against humanity, not to protest the fuel price hike.

Addressing a rally on city's Bangabandhu Avenue, he also alleged that BNP was also involved in the attack on police Monday alongside Jamaat-e-Islami.

## BNP overplayed

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improvised explosive devices from a safe house two miles away from the rally site.

"The BNP was quick to claim extremists had been plotting to attack her [Khaleda Zia], and the party hastily called for nationwide protests December 24," the cable said, adding "As of midday on the 24th, BNP supporters had organized scattered protests, with additional demonstrations planned for later in the day."

The diplomatic cable said undeterred by the alleged threat, Khaleda Zia continued her campaign outside Dhaka, as did her rival AL President Sheikh Hasina, who left the capital early in the day for campaign stops in northern region.

The cable said newspaper headlines in the morning of December 24 carried Khaleda Zia's claims that the militants had planned to bomb her rally. Those behind the alleged attack had feared a BNP victory and were intent upon preventing her from returning to power, she claimed.

"As details of the December 23 incident emerged, it became apparent the BNP had decided to exploit the incident for political purposes. The BNP's protest call appeared intended to motivate party supporters to rally around the Chairperson," said the cable.

The diplomatic cable said conveniently, the incident also bumped the story of Khaleda's youngest son Arafat Rahman Koko's involvement in the Siemens graft scam. Local newspapers had led the previous day with allegations that Koko had siphoned millions of dollars into bank accounts in Singapore, including payments from Siemens for favorable treatment in a cellular phone tender, it said.

"Police tell us [Khaleda] Zia was never in danger, and the encounter took place 4 km away from the rally venue. At the same time, [Khaleda] Zia's security personnel have claimed they were warned to avoid the rally venue and have told us they altered her programme in response to these warnings," the US embassy said in the cable.

"Awami League sources told us they were also warned about a possible attack on December 23. We continue to press counterparts for additional information about the incident and any threats against the two political leaders," it added.

## Electrocution

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Ali Akbar, 35, and Md Monir, 30, died on the spot.

Injured Harun, 40, Alamgir, 35, Jasim, 25, Zakir, 20, and Motaleb, 35, were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The seven were at Kuddus Plastic at Ali Bahar of Shyampur.

## Suicide attack

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president, was inaugurated on October 7, 2010, amid mounting reports of secret peace talks with Taliban leaders and key insurgent groups.

His death is the arguably the most high-profile political assassination since the 2001 US-led invasion ousted the Taliban from power 10 years ago and comes just two months after Karzai's brother Ahmed Wali Karzai was also killed.

"An explosion happened inside the house of Burhanuddin Rabbani as a result of which Rabbani was martyred and several others were wounded," said Kabul police spokesman Hashmat Stanikzai.

The bomber struck close to the US embassy. It was the second attack within a week to strike within Kabul's supposedly secure diplomatic zone.

An AFP reporter saw an ambulance at the scene and said police had blocked off surrounding roads.

The reporter also heard guards at the house shouting for an ambulance for Rabbani's deputy, Mohammad Masoom Stanikzai.