

Gandhi clan blamed for keeping India in poverty

REUTERS, New Delhi

The Gandhi dynasty that has ruled India for most of the 64 years since independence has kept the world's largest democracy in poverty, leaders of a protest movement said yesterday as they prepared renewed rallies to target the government on corruption.

A three-day fast led by 74-year-old activist Anna Hazare and a plan for thousands of people to picket the home of Congress party leader Sonia Gandhi on New Years Eve will be a test of strength for the anti-corruption movement that forced a government U-turn in the summer.

"India was not destined to be a poor country, India was destined to be a developed country but corruption has kept it poor," said Kiran Bedi, a member of Hazare's inner circle.

"Who has exercised corruption? The party in power, and the party in power for the majority of the years has been the Congress party and in the Congress



Anna Hazare

Sonia Gandhi

party, the Gandhi family."

India's fast-growing economy is Asia's third largest but many of the country's 1.2 billion people suffer from inadequate nutrition and have no electricity.

Hazare plans to begin his hunger strike in Mumbai today. Almost 100,000 people have signed up online to express support for a three-day "fill the jails" protest picketing politicians homes and courting arrest.

A fast led by Hazare in August brought tens of thousands of people onto the streets. After initially arresting

him and dismissing him as an anarchist, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's government caved in to his demands to quickly pass a tougher version of anti-graft legislation first proposed decades ago.

The protests also triggering an ongoing debate about the nature of India's democracy.

Hazare's supporters say voting in elections must be supplemented by direct pressure on politicians, while traditional parties say the protests risk "mobocracy."

"If hundreds of thousands of people coming onto the street can't get their government to hear their voices, there is something seriously wrong with the way our democracy is being implemented," close Hazare aide Arvind Kejriwal told Reuters.

Corruption scandals have tainted Singh's second term, with a multi-billion dollar telecoms scam landing a former minister and other senior officials in jail.



Officers from Yemen defence ministry's media arm, known as the Department of Moral Guidance, stage a sit-in outside their Sanaa headquarters yesterday, calling for General Ali al-Shater, who has headed the department since 1978, to be fired over corruption, witnesses said.

Hackers hit US security firm Stratfor

BBC ONLINE

The activist hacker group Anonymous says it has stolen thousands of emails, passwords and credit card details from a US-based security think-tank.

The hackers claim they were able to obtain the information because the company, Stratfor, did not encrypt it.

They say Stratfor's clients include the US defence department, law enforcement agencies and media organisations.

Anonymous has previously claimed responsibility for cyber attacks on financial institutions seen as enemies of the whistle-blowing website Wikileaks.

The Austin-based company says it has now suspended the operation on its servers and email.

Syria gunfire kills 23

Opposition urges UN, Arab intervention

AFP, Damascus

Syria's opposition yesterday urged United Nations and Arab League intervention as gunfire from security forces killed 23 people in the besieged central city of Homs.

Syrian National Council (SNC) head Burhan Ghalium told reporters at a Paris news conference that some of the observers were in the besieged city "but they are saying they cannot go where the authorities do not want them to go."

He sought UN and Arab League intervention "to put an end to this tragedy," and urged the UN Security Council to "adopt the Arab League's plan and ensure that it is applied."

"It is better if the UN Security Council takes this (Arab League) plan, adopts and provides the means for its application," Ghalium said. "That would give it more force."

The Arab "plan to defuse the crisis is a good plan, but I do not believe the Arab League really has the means" to enforce it.

The mission is part of an Arab plan endorsed by Syria on November 2 that calls for the withdrawal of the military from towns and residential districts, a halt to violence

against civilians and the release of detainees.

Since signing the agreement, Assad's regime has been accused of intensifying its crackdown.

An initial group of 50 observers was to have landed in Syria yesterday to oversee the deal aimed at ending a bloody crackdown on anti-regime dissent, which has showed no signs of abating since it erupted in March.

Earlier, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said "rocket fire and heavy machineguns in the Baba Amro quarter killed 15 people and wounded dozens."

"The situation is frightening and the shelling is the most intense of the past three days," it said in a statement received by AFP in Nicosia.

Seven civilians died in other parts of the central Syrian city and its suburbs, and a woman was killed at Talbisseh near Homs.

Another three people, including a 14-year-old boy, were shot dead by security forces at a demonstration in Khattab in neighbouring Hama province, and a youth was shot dead in Saraqeb in the northwestern province of Idlib.

7 dead in US Christmas shooting

AFP, Texas

Police found seven bodies in an apartment on Sunday in the US state of Texas after what officials described as a Christmas Day murder-suicide.

Two handguns were discovered at the apartment in Grapevine, Texas, near Dallas, and there were no signs of forced entry.

"We believe the shooter is one of those dead in the apartment," said Grapevine police Lieutenant Todd Dearing.

All seven people were found near a Christmas tree in a living room area of the two-story apartment.

Dearing said that authorities believe it was a family Christmas gathering, with the victims ranging in age from 18 or 20 to their 50s or 60s. Their names were not immediately released.

Taking the pulse of a Himalayan glacier

BBC ONLINE

Ngozumpa Glacier in Nepal snakes away from the sixth highest mountain in the world, Cho Oyo.

It's not the greatest glacier to look at - far from it. It's smothered in a layer of rocky debris that's fallen from the surrounding cliffs, giving it a very grey, dirty appearance.

But Ngozumpa is generating a lot of scientific interest at the moment.

The Nepalese Himalayas have been warming significantly more than the global mean temperature in recent decades.

Glaciers in much of the region are showing signs of shrinking, thinning, and retreating; and this is producing a lot of meltwater.

On Ngozumpa, some of this water is seen to pool on the surface and then drain away via a series of streams and caverns to the snout of the glacier.

There, some 25km from the mountain, an enormous lake is growing behind a mound of dumped rock fragments.

This lake, called Spillway, has the

potential to be about 6km long, 1km wide and 100m deep.

The concern is that this great mass of water could eventually breach the debris dam and hurtle down the valley, sweeping away the Sherpa villages in its path. The threat is not immediate, but it's a situation that needs monitoring, say scientists.

One of the researchers at work on Ngozumpa is Ulyana Horodyskyj, from the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences (CIRES) at the University of Colorado in Boulder, US.

She is setting up remote cameras to monitor the surface, or supraglacial, pools of water that dot the length of Ngozumpa. Some are small; some are big - the size of several football fields.

Already, she has been able to establish just how dynamic these water features can be as they drain and fill in rapid time.

The volumes involved can be prodigious. In one event, her cameras spied a supraglacial lake losing more than 100,000 cubic metres of water in just two days. Within five days, the lake had recovered half the volume, fed by waters from higher up the glacier.

Suicide bomber kills seven in Iraq

REUTERS, Baghdad

At least seven people were killed when a suicide car bomber hit Iraq's interior ministry yesterday in the latest attack since a crisis erupted between the Shi'ite-led government and Sunni leaders a week ago.

Shi'ite Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki sought the arrest of the Sunni vice president last Monday and asked parliament to fire his own Sunni deputy, triggering turmoil that threatens new sectarian strife just after the last US troops withdrew.

The blast occurred when the bomber drove his vehicle into a security cordon outside the ministry in central Baghdad, detonating an explosion that left dead and wounded on the ground and set fire to nearby vehicles, police said.

Dropout still

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terminal and Ebtedayee exams, some 1.3 lakh did not appear at the test. The number of absentees was 2.16 lakh last year. And while 1.48 lakh students failed last year, it is only 59,879 this year.

Distribution of cent percent textbooks for free, an increased amount of stipend, and providing free tiffin, among other government steps, contributed greatly to such a decline in both the rates.

Yet the government could not keep all the children in classrooms.

With this year's exams results published yesterday, education officials fear a large number of the absentees and unsuccessful students will quit their studies. They say many families will not allow their kids to take the exam again due to financial constraints.

"Those who didn't take the examination or failed are mostly from rural areas. It's found in most cases that these students feel disinterested to come back to schools since they get involved in jobs to support their families," said an official of the Directorate of Primary Education.

Many of the unsuccessful students are girls, and once they fail, their parents do not feel encouraged to send them to school, which is also

a big problem, he added. Talking to The Daily Star, a teacher of a city school said, "We need to monitor whether they continue their studies or dropout."

He also points out that there has yet to be a study as to exactly how many students quit school and why at the primary level.

Experts recommend that the guardians of the unsuccessful students and also those who did not take the exam be provided with motivation for a continuation of their children's education.

Former caretaker government adviser Rasheda K Chowdhury said a positive trend was seen in the primary education thanks to government intervention, but many children are failing to make it.

There are many reasons behind the dropout and it will take time to cut it to a satisfactory level, said Rasheda, also executive director of Campaign for Popular Education.

The government needs to focus on the underprivileged section, she said, adding that the stipend coverage should be widened and so should midday meals in remote areas.

"The government will have to invest more in education to address these issues," she noted.

Razzak laid to rest with state honour

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hospital on Friday, was buried after his fourth namaz-e-janaza on the graveyard premises around 4:00pm. Dhaka district administration accorded a guard of honour to the noted freedom fighter before his burial.

Alongside family members and friends, hundreds of people including senior AL leaders, ministers, cultural activists and academicians joined the funeral, many of whom were seen weeping.

Razzak's family members, senior AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Suranjit Sengupta, Obaidul Quader, Deputy Speaker of Parliament Shawkat Ali, AL acting general secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, among others, were present during the burial.

Minutes before his fourth janaza, his body was flown back to Dhaka from his

village home at Damuday in Shariatpur by a helicopter. Earlier in the morning, his body was taken to Damuday where thousands of people paid their last tribute to their "beloved son".

The people of Damuday received the body of Razzak with due solemnity.

Black flags were hoisted on houses, businesses and offices of private organisations in the area. All businesses were kept shut from 11:00am to 5:00pm.

Hundreds of people from Damuday and nearby areas attended his third namaz-e-janaza on the Upazila parishad ground at Damuday at 2:30pm.

At the janaza, Razzak's sons Nahin Razzak and Fahin Razzak, urged the people to pray for the peace of their father's departed soul.

Razzak, former water resources minister and also an advisory committee member of the ruling AL,

had been suffering from kidney and liver problems and had been undergoing treatment at King's College Hospital in London since September.

His body was brought to Dhaka on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the cabinet at its regular meeting yesterday unanimously adopted a condolence motion at the death of Razzak.

The condolence motion, moved by the cabinet secretary, recalled Razzak's lifelong contribution to the country's all democratic movements including the Liberation War in 1971.

The cabinet members also prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul and conveyed deep sympathy to the bereaved family members.

To many, the death of Razzak, a close associate of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and an architect of Mujib Bahini, is an irreparable loss to the nation.

Born on August 1, 1942,

Razzak entered politics when he was a student. He was elected secretary of the Fazlul Haq Hall Students Union of Dhaka University in 1963.

Abdur Razzak was among the young crop of politicians who were to make significant contributions to the 1971 Liberation War. Prior to that he was actively involved with and played a vital role in the Six Point movement of 1966 and the mass upsurge of 1969.

Razzak was elected a member of the provincial assembly (MPA) in 1970. After the emergence of Bangladesh in 1971, he was elected member of parliament in 1973, 1991, 1996, 2001 and 2008.

He quit Awami League in 1983 and formed Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Awami League (BAKSAL). He became the presidium member of AL in 1992 when the two parties merged.

Kim Jong Il's son meets with S Koreans

AP, Pyongyang

North Korea's next leader burnished his diplomatic skills yesterday, welcoming a private South Korean mourning delegation as state media revealed a new title that gives Kim Jong Un authority over political matters.

The South Korean delegation stood in a line on a red carpet and bowed silently during their visit to the Kumsusan Memorial Palace, where Kim Jong Il's body is lying in state in a bier surrounded by flowers and flanked by an honor guard.

Kim Jong Un gave the South Koreans his thanks after the expressed condolences and sympathy, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said. Seoul's Unification Ministry confirmed the meeting in a statement but didn't elaborate.

The lead delegates were the widow of former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, who engineered a "sunshine" engagement policy with the North and held a landmark summit with Kim Jong Il in 2000, and Hyundai Group Chairwoman Hyun Jeong-eun, whose late husband had ties to the North.

Their meeting with Kim Jong Un could be intended to push South Korea to pursue previously agreed upon cooperative projects that would give North Korea much-needed aid, said Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies, which is in South Korea.



Kim Jong Un

50 injured in B'baria clash

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were admitted to

Brahmanbaria Sadar Hospital. They are Manju Mia, 30, Safia Begum, 50, Shukkur Ali, 23, Mahbub Ali, 30, Muhammad Ali, 22, Md Foysal Mia, 15, Akter, 18, Belayet Hossain, 30, Habibur Rahman, 60, Helal Mia, 39, Rafiqul Islam, 20, Mokhles Mia, 60, Nafiza Khandaker, 20, Jonaki Akter, 18, and Fatema Begum, 67.

Twelve others were taken to Sarail Upazila Health Complex, police said.

Lawmen fired 23 tear-gas canisters and nine rounds of rubber bullet to disperse the mob, Sarail OC Md Ghausuddin told The Daily Star.

According to Sarail UNO office, police and

witnesses, the clash followed an altercation between two people of the villages over CNG-run auto rickshaw fare in the morning.

But soon it took a violent turn as relatives of both the persons equipped with spears and machetes joined in.

The rioters also snatched mobile phones and cash from about a hundred passengers of the stranded buses, police said.

On information, reserve police from Brahmanbaria, Sarail and Shahbazzpur units, Rab personnel headed by ASM Shahedul Islam and UNO of Sarail upazila ASM Shahedul Islam rushed to the spot.

Later the Sarail UNO

ordered both the OCs of Brahmanbaria and Sarail police stations to investigate the matter and find out the real culprits who are frequently engaging in clashes at the same point.

No case was filed till filing of the report in the evening.

Such violent clashes are common affair in the area and those occur over establishing domination, Hazi Abdur Rahman, owner of Rahman Market at the intersection, said.

"We face trouble in doing business due to frequent clashes among the villagers of the neighbouring areas," he told The Daily Star adding that Uchaliapara and Bodbaria are the two other villages who clash very often.

Many voters still unaware

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inform the voters about the system, he mentioned adding, the EC officials have been organising programmes to educate the voters about the electronic voting system by showing videos on large display panels at different public places. Even the officials are going door to door.

Motaher Hossain Anis, chairman of Comilla Commerce College Foundation, yesterday said he has not yet seen the machine.

"So far as I know, people in my area didn't get the opportunity to learn about the new voting system," added Motaher, a resident of Chowdhury Para which is about one kilometre from the returning officer's office.

Sania Bhuiyan, a college student and first time voter, said though she has heard

about the device, she has no knowledge about it.

But Mohammad Shafik, 60, a cleaning staff of Kosti market at Kandirpar, does have the knowledge. He was present at a recent meeting at the town hall market. Officials at that meeting demonstrated how to vote using the EVM.

Contacted, pro-opposition mayor hopeful Monirul Hoque Sakku said, "Personally I am against using the EVM, but I have accepted it as the EC insisted."

The former BNP leader also expressed his satisfaction at the performance of the EC.

Asked about the overall situation regarding the EVM, Shah Md Alamgir Khan, convener of Transparency International Bangladesh's Comilla chapter, said using the EVM is a good decision

but the EC should conduct a massive campaign to let the people know about it.

Otherwise questions might be raised about the whole election process, warned Alamgir.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam, lecturer at Comilla Govt College, said though the successful use of the EVM still remains a big challenge for the EC, there is a lot of enthusiasm among the voters about the system.

A total of 1,69,273 voters including 86,074 females will exercise their mandate on January 5 to elect a mayor and 36 ward councillors. Of the councillor posts, nine are reserved for women.

Nine aspirants are fighting for the mayoral post while 287 are contesting the posts of ward councillors.