

## Road march

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Leaders of the four-party alliance -- BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Khelafat Majlish and BJP -- and other like-minded parties including Islami Oikya Jote will join the road march, organised to mount pressure on the government for reinstatement of the caretaker government system.

On her way to Chittagong, the BNP chief will address two street rallies at Noor Manikchar ground in Chandania and Madhya Muktioddha College ground in Comilla. Later in the day, she will speak at a rally in Feni, her home district.

Apparently, the road march is going to be an expensive political show-down as over 1,500 arches have already been erected at many points on Dhaka-Chittagong highway and the port city to welcome the leader of the opposition.

BNP insiders said at least Tk 12,000-15,000 was needed for each of the arches.

In the capital, the sources added, the party has rented around 3,000 minibuses for the march. A minibus for two days costs at least Tk 10,000-12,000.

BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, however, said the number of vehicles in the motorcade would be around 6,000.

The BNP standing committee last night discussed the preparation for today's road march. They also discussed the agitation programmes to be announced from the Chittagong rally.

The committee, however, did not finalise whether the party would announce a "Dhaka blockade programme".

Senior leaders said the chairperson would finalise the programmes in consultation with the party colleagues during her stay at the Chittagong circuit house tonight.

Chittagong City Mayor M Manjur Alam will receive the BNP chief at the city gate. Khaleda will spend the night at the circuit house.

The port city and different parts of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway have been decorated with arches, portraits of party bigwigs, banners, posters and placards to welcome the opposition leader.

BNP Chairperson's adviser Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, also president of Chittagong city unit of the party, said it would not be surprising if two million people show up at the Polo Ground rally.

Addressing a press conference at a hotel in the port city, he hoped the government would not attempt to obstruct the programme.

Meanwhile, BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday alleged that the government was trying to hinder the programme. "People will resist any attempt to foil the road march," he warned while talking to newsmen at the BNP central office.

He hoped that over 4,000 vehicles would take part in the road march from the capital while another 2,000 will join in the middle of the journey.

The BNP chairperson on September 27 last year declared three road marches towards Sylhet, Rajshahi and Chittagong to drum up support for reinstatement of the caretaker government system.

The Dhaka-Sylhet march was held on October 10 but the one to Chittagong was postponed due to Eid and Hajj. The Rajshahi road march was later redirected to Chapainawabganj.

The BNP chairperson also led another road march towards Khulna on November 26 and 27.

The caretaker government provision was scrapped from the constitution through the 15th amendment last year. As per the existing provision, the present government will hold the next parliamentary election. BNP and allies say they will not let the national election take place without a non-party caretaker government.

## Alarming rise

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tortured by different law enforcement agencies. Of them, 17 died.

The annual document was prepared on the basis of newspaper reports and information from Odhikar activists working across the country.

Another rights organisation, Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK), in its recent report put the figure of mysterious disappearances and secret killings at 51 during the same period. Meanwhile, the National Human Rights Commission expressed its concern over the rise of such incidents.

According to the Odhikar report, a total 84 persons fell victim to extra-judicial killings in 2011. The figures were 127 in 2010 and 154 in 2009.

Noted politicians, lawyers and journalists also spoke at the function chaired by Odhikar President CR Abrar. The speakers suggested that the government set up a tribunal to deal with incidents of disappearances, secret killings, deaths in custody and 'crossfire'.

Disappearance is an old issue in Bangladesh, and it has started again, Abrar said, adding that such incidents in 1973-74 were also protested.

CEO of Boishakhi TV Monjurul Ahsan Bulbul said the report might have flaws, but the government has to defend it with data, "not by batons".

The report said 206 journalists came under attack in 2011. The number was 178 in 2010 and 145 in 2009.

Odhikar said India's Border Security Force killed 31 Bangladeshi nationals last year when the killing of 15-year-old Felani was a much-talked-about incident. The number was 74 in 2010 and 98 in 2009.

The report also said the number of deaths due to mob beating decreased in 2011, but now it has taken a "dramatic turn". One Shamsuddin Milon, 16, was killed after police handed him over to the public at Tekerhat Mor in Noakhali.

## Channel i

**FROM PAGE 20**  
Bee - Powered by Horlicks" will be the first ever "Spelling Bee" competition to be held in over 1,000 schools across the country.

Students from Class VI to X from both Bangla and English medium schools will be eligible to participate in the competition.

"Spelling Bee" is an internationally acclaimed competition where the contesting students are asked to spell out English words. In countries such as the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Mexico, Indonesia, Pakistan and India, such competitions are quite popular.

Russell T Ahmed, CEO of Champs21.com, and Mohammad Masud, general manager of Channel i, signed the MoU.

As the official telecasting partner, Channel i will telecast over 30 episodes of the competition, which is expected to be the largest TV reality show ever.

The education-based program will be held over three rounds, namely Online, Division and TV rounds.

Champs21.com is hopeful that the launch of "Spelling Bee" in Bangladesh will help increase the significance of the English language in the daily lives of students and help develop the basics of English communication skills.

Detailed information about the contest will be available on www.champs21.com and www.thedailystar.net.

At the signing ceremony held at the head office of the TV channel, Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, Soumendra S Das, marketing director of GSK, Faridur Reza Sagor, managing director of Channel i and Shykh Seraj, director of Channel i, were present besides top officials of the partner organisations.

from the police van, observed the report.

A total of 161 people were killed in mob beating last year. The figures were 174 in 2010 and 127 in 2009.

According to the report, the number of dowry-related violence shot up to 516 in 2011 from 378 in 2010.

Moreover, as many as 711 women and children were violated last year when 88 of them -- 54 women and 34 girl children -- were killed after rape.

The report said 672 women became victims of sexual harassment during the same period. Of them, six were killed, 59 injured, 91 assaulted, 12 abducted, 15 became victims of attempted rape and 29 committed suicide.

It said a total of 135 people were killed in political violence last year while 220 in 2010.

In addition, many incidents of violence, arson and loot took place in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 2011 when 40 people were killed, 17 were abducted and 18 women violated.

Odhikar also said the government made the Anti-Terrorism Act 2009 more repressive and strict last year and expressed its concern that it might be used as a weapon against political rivals, demonstrators, journalists and human rights activists.

## Comilla polls

**FROM PAGE 1**  
believe in the power of people and the party which has public support, will come to power, the government will never interfere in any electoral process."

Hasina was speaking to the central leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League as they came to Gono Bhaban to exchange greetings with her on the occasion of the founding anniversary of the organisation.

Reiterating her previous stand on holding the next general elections under a political government, the prime minister said, "Why did the BNP leaders forget the sufferings caused to them during the past caretaker government?"

Some people who have no public support but aspire to enjoy power, are misguiding the Leader of the Opposition, Hasina observed and said "no caretaker government but the people only can bring BNP to power".

Turning to the current political situation, the prime minister said the present government is making efforts to build a poverty- and hunger-free nation.

Urging the BCL leaders to remain above luxury, she said luxury does not suit when millions of people live in poverty.

Hasina, who earlier left the post of organisational head of the BCL, asked the leaders and workers to devote to learning, mould themselves with the ideals of Bangabandhu and work constructively to regain public confidence in the student politics.

"Live simple, think high, and build yourselves as the self-dignified and self-restrained citizens."

She said a student leader lacking education and knowledge can give nothing to the nation. "It has been proved after 1975, what a disastrous situation arises when leadership of the nation goes to the uneducated leaders."

Recalling the glorious history of the organisation, Hasina said, BCL is such an organisation whose leaders and workers sacrificed most for the country's liberation as well as restoration of democracy.

The prime minister said the military rulers after 1975 misguided the meritorious students by giving them illegal arms and luring them to wealth. They also started politics of killing on the campuses.

Earlier, she inaugurated Chhatra League's new website with address: www.bs.org.bd.

## Khaleda

**FROM PAGE 1**  
tomorrow with a grand rally in the port city, party sources said.

Polymakers of the party at a meeting last night discussed the constitution of its delegation and strategy for the talks but decided to sit again to finalise that.

Asked, the leaders declined to say anything in this regard.

Party insiders, however, said Khaleda along with other leaders of BNP will go to the Bangabhaban on January 11 on the president's invitation for dialogue. And she will firmly place her demand to the president to initiate talks on restoring the caretaker government system for holding national elections.

Meanwhile, addressing a rally in the capital on January 1, Khaleda categorically urged the president to keep the caretaker issue on the agenda to make the talks with him a success.

On December 26, the president invited the ruling Awami League and the main opposition BNP to the dialogue.

The BNP-led four-party alliance at a meeting the same day decided to join the talks.

## EVMs in polls

**FROM PAGE 20**  
said voting with the machines was a lot easier and quicker. Polling officers too felt it easy to work with the machines.

BNP decided not to back any candidate in the Comilla polls as the commission turned down its demand for army deployment and not using the machines. The BNP boycotted the Narayanganj City Corporation elections too on the same count.

The machines were tested at the Chittagong City Corporation elections on June 17 last year. They were successfully used at 14 polling stations.

On the next general elections, the EC chief said, "2014 is a long way away. It will be the decision of the next Election Commission and the people. But we are totally convinced by the machines."

He said the Election Commission has passed the "acid test" by using the machines in the Comilla City Corporation polls held on January 5. "People found the machines very user-friendly," ATM Shamsul Huda said, adding, "I think all confusion regarding its use should come to an end after the success of Comilla polls."

He said the Election Commission will stress the use of the machines in all polls leading up to the 2014 general elections. "The more we will use, the more confusion centring it will be reduced," he said.

## 2nd war crimes

**FROM PAGE 20**  
Law Minister Shafique Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We will form another three-judge tribunal like the existing one [International Crimes Tribunal] for quick disposal of war crimes-related cases," he said.

The International Crimes Tribunal Act allows the government to form more than one tribunal for disposing of war crimes cases.

The new tribunal will sit in the Old High Court building in the capital, where the Law Commission has its office now. A process has already started to shift the office of the Law Commission to another place, said the law minister.

He added that judges would be appointed for the new tribunal immediately after "we arrange logistics and staff for it."

The International Crimes Tribunal formed on March 25, 2010 has High Court Judge Md Nizamul Huq as its chairman. Its two other members are HC Judge ATM Fazle Kabir and a retired district judge, AKM Zaheer Ahmed.

The tribunal has framed 20 specific war crimes charges against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee, and is now hearing depositions of the prosecution witnesses.

It is scheduled to hold the hearings on January 15 and 29 on the charge framing against BNP leader Salauddin Qader Chowdhury and Jamaat leader Abdul Qader Molla.

The tribunal will give its decision on January 9 as to whether it will take war crimes charges against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam and present Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami.

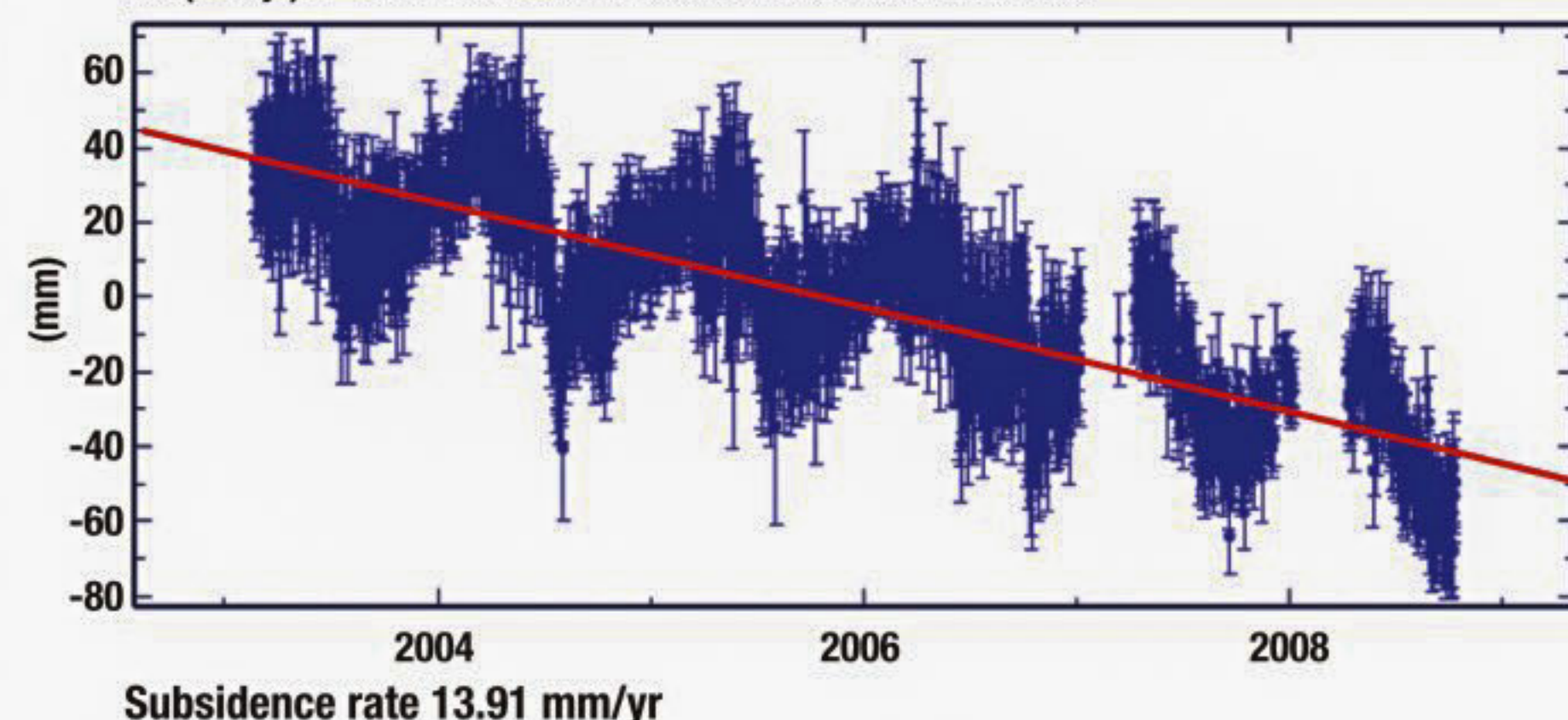
## Groundwater loss

### GPS VELOCITY

Vertical Component

DHAKA Up Offset -32.190 m

rate(mm/yr) = - 13.91 ± 0.17 nrms = 1.06 wrms = 13.2 mm # 1845



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soil are filled with air until they get recharged with rainwater again," said Prof Humayun.

Experts also blame movements of tectonic plates (large rigid blocks) for land subsidence.

Bangladesh is on the junction of Indian plate and Burma sub-plate. The Burma sub-plate is overriding the Indian plate, causing subsidence of Dhaka land mass.

The subsidence due to motions of tectonic plates is much slower; it should not be more than 3 to 5 mm a year. But Dhaka's land mass is dropping by 13.91 millimetres a year, as the plate motion coincides with water extraction, says Prof Humayun.

The geologist, who is also an earthquake expert, said that since the city is located in a quake-prone area, the land subsidence puts it in even greater danger.

Other geologists, too, have warned that the declining water table poses extreme hazards during earthquakes. It could lead to subsidence of the clay soil plate the capital is standing on.

There are chances that the vacuum created underground might be filled with brackish seawater, turning the area into a saline land, according to expert analysis.

Recently, a Bangladesh Agriculture Development Corporation research pointed to a fast depletion of groundwater level -- six metres in the past seven years. The water table has already dropped to 52 metres below mean sea level (MSL).

MSL is a measure of the average height of the ocean's surface (such as the halfway point between the mean high tide and the mean low tide); used as a standard in reckoning land elevation.

Geologists and environmentalists on several occasions warned that an inadequate natural recharge and too much groundwater withdrawal might cause land subsidence what many cities in the world experienced earlier.

Against the backdrop of surface water pollution by industrial and household waste, 83 percent of the water supplied to about 15 million city dwellers comes from underground.

Experts also say the pressure on groundwater is increasing every year as water from rivers, canals, lakes and other water bodies have become polluted.

"Nowhere in the world authorities depend fully on groundwater," said urban expert Professor Nazrul Islam

and. "If we want to live in this city, we have to stop groundwater abuse."

Water Supply Authorities in Dhaka supply around 1,560 million litres a day against a required 2,000 million litres. Of that, they lift around 1,250 million litres from underground.

Some new commercial water supply companies have mushroomed in the cities and they extract groundwater to make a profit. Environmentalists condemn the act but nobody cares.

A study of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council shows with most of the city land rapidly coming under concrete cover, rainwater is being obstructed to enter the aquifer. The declination of groundwater occurs less in green and spacious areas.

Asked about remedies, Prof Syed Humayun Akhter said the wetlands and water bodies should be preserved for groundwater recharge.

"It is not possible for us to limit groundwater withdrawal as a full-scale treatment of surface water is not possible. So we should go for groundwater recharging," he said.

He feared that the continued fall of water table could eventually lead to desertification in and around Dhaka.

## Roadmap for ICT

**FROM PAGE 1**  
information and communications technology-based healthcare and create a working group to formulate the policy.

Dr Alain B Labrique, director at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, presented the keynote paper at the concluding session at The Daily Star centre.

Humayun Kabir, secretary to the health ministry, chaired the session and Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, moderated the session.

Dr Labrique said Bangladesh has a large number of mobile phone users, who use the device in case of emergency, particularly in case of maternal and neonatal care.

Mentioning a survey conducted in Gaibandha with the support of Johns Hopkins University, Labrique said, maternal and neonatal death risks reduced in cases of those who used cell phones to call doctors in an emergency.

He stressed the need for formulating a holistic policy that could make Bangladesh a global example of success in ICT-based healthcare in the world.

David Alyward, an Ashoka

fellow, said ICT-based healthcare would open up an opportunity to change the health management approach from "caring the sick" to "caring wellness."

Alyward said it should be ensured that all health organisations have access to information, and time, money or energy are not wasted for doing the same work already done by an agency.

NI Khan, personal secretary to the prime minister, said the colloquium on ICT based healthcare a timely initiative, and suggested that a forum should be formed to follow up on the recommendations and activities in ICT based healthcare.

Referring to the government's vision to have a "digital Bangladesh", he said as a part of the plan the government has already launched 4,500 information centres with internet facilities at union level in the country.

Ananya Raihan of D.Net, a research organisation, presented a summary of the recommendations that came out in 11 sessions of the two-day colloquium.

The recommendations include creation of a working group to formulate a policy, empowering frontline health

workers to record data on patients, connecting patients and doctors in case of emergency, and development of low-cost technology and accessories.

Humayun Kabir, secretary to health ministry, said the present government has been working to implement its pledge to have a "digital Bangladesh."

"The government has taken many initiatives for using ICT in many sectors. All results of those initiatives may not be visible at this moment," said the secretary.

Bangladesh had got many opportunities in different sectors in the past but those could not be utilised for lack of proper policies and initiatives, said Mahfuz Anam.

"We, the people of Bangladesh, have always been good starters for many things, but could not finish those. We will lose our opportunities if we do not act properly."

He thanked the speakers, participants, coordinators and sponsors for making the programme a success.

A question-answer round was held after the concluding session.

## Unicef chief

**FROM PAGE 20**  
the executive director of the Unicef after he took office in 2010.

One of the main purposes of Lake's visit would be to see by himself various success stories of Bangladesh, particularly in the areas of child-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG-2 and -3 on education and gender parity and MDG-4 for child health, for which Bangladesh received the MDG Achievement Award in 2010.

Lake, who is also the UN Under Secretary General for Children, would also visit a number of flagship programmes of the present government on child and maternal health, education of children specially the girl child, social safety and livelihood skills training projects for urban working children, food and nutrition project for children implemented in collaboration with the Bangladesh government and the Unicef, said a foreign ministry press release.

During his visit, Lake and his delegation will pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. He would also call on Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque to discuss opportunities offered by the Unicef's New Country Programme for the years 2012-2016.

Lake became the sixth executive director of Unicef on May 1, 2010, bringing with him more than 45 years of public service, said a press release of the Unicef here yesterday.

Immediately prior to his appointment with Unicef, he served as distinguished professor in the Practice of Diplomacy at Edmund A Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University.

## Her dream

**FROM PAGE 20**  
That's my dream," she said at a reception accorded to her by Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra at the Jatitya Press Club yesterday.

The brave young woman won people's hearts when she decided to divorce her husband at their wedding ceremony in Barguna on November 11 last year.

Yesterday, she said she believed it was important for a girl in Bangladesh to become economically independent in order to raise her voice against dowry.

Farjana was working in an insurance company when her parents arranged her marriage to Shawkat Ali Heron, headmaster of Kolapara Uttar Chakamoiya Government Primary School. As the ceremony got under way, the bridegroom's family asked hers for dowry. Farjana did not hesitate to make her decision right then and there.

"The wedding day was the biggest day of my life as in the case of any other girl. But because of dowry it turned out to be the biggest nightmare of my life. I don't want this to ever happen to any other girl," she said while talking to The Daily Star before the reception.

She urged the government, parents, media and others concerned to provide all-out support to women across the country in their struggle against the dowry system.

Farjana, who holds a post-graduate degree in Social Welfare from Eden College, says she has always been vocal against dowry.

"Dowry destroys the very rights of a girl," she said. "We know that asking for dowry is a crime and yet we hardly protest when demands for dowry are made. Girls should stand up against this curse the moment they face it."

Farjana called upon men to consider women as their co-fighters, not competitors.

Other participants at the programme noted that young women needed to raise their collective voice against dowry. They said Farjana was an inspiration in the movement against this social evil.

## Congress is free to quit alliance

**FROM PAGE 20**  
on the issue of assault on the principal of Raigunj University college on January 5 because we opposed FDI in retail, frequent petrol price hikes and total interference into federal structure."

"Lokayukta was forcibly included in the Lokpal bill. They [Congress] had not paid heed to our words. Voting was not done on it," Mamata told reporters at the State secretariat.

"If Congress feels they can go with CPI(M), they can do it. The Door is open for them. If Congress works with CPI(M), they will not get Trinamool Congress. TC can go it alone," she said.

Congress was worried because Trinamool Congress decided to contest coming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh and Manipur, Mamata said, adding she was speaking as the party chief.

Alleging that Congress and CPI(M) were working together, she said the "small incident" of assault on college principal Dilip De Sarkar after a clash between Trinamool Chhatra Parishad and Chhatra Parishad of Congress was being "blown out of proportion intentionally" to malign her party.

Mamata, however, dubbed the incident as "unfortunate" and said "Sometime young people commit mistakes. Those who did it (assaulted the principal) will be arrested ... We are taking whatever action is required to be taken in this case."

Trinamool Congress also accused Congress of trying to create lawlessness in the State in order to "help" CPI(M) and warned that both government and the party would not tolerate it. "NOT AT ANYONE'S MERCY" "We are not in the ministry

to satisfy anyone's will, but we are there to fulfil people's wishes," West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee (WBPC) president Pradip Bhattacharya told PTI yesterday.

Referring to Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's outburst, Pradip said "what she has said is very clear to us. We are not here at anyone's mercy."

Stating that the Congress and Trinamool Congress had fought the Assembly elections together and the latter benefited from it, the WBPC chief said "the Trinamool Congress has also got thousands of Congress votes in seats where it won."

"We are in the ministry to fulfil the desires of the people who voted for us and on direction of our party High Command," he said.