

Dhaka-Sunamganj

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the country, says Bulkhead Naujan Malik Samity that represents the owners of such boats.

Samity President Tofazzal Hossain Badal said, "I along with other leaders went to the deputy commissioners concerned and even to the BIWTA chairman for their intervention in vain."

The association enforced a strike on January 3-4 on the waterway at Dighirpar, Bajitpur in Kishoreganj to protest against extortion, he said. During the strike local lawmaker Afzol Hossain, the DC and police officials requested them to call off the programme assuring them of checking extortion, he added.

In presence of more than 1,000 aggrieved owners and workers, the lawmaker pledged to check extortion

within 15 days with the help of the authorities concerned, Badal said, adding, the situation, however, remains the same.

Though the government earns huge revenue from the sector involving over five lakh workers, the authorities concerned have paid no heed to their cries, he added.

Idhan with the help of three crew members recollected the toll points, "We paid Tk 200 in Jamalganj from where we started on Friday. At each of around 15 points we had to pay Tk 20 to Tk 50 in Itna, Pachhat, Dhanpur, Lipsa, Singpur and Elenjuria and Tk 500 to BIWTA's lessee in Meghna police station area.

"We paid Tk 200 to Tk 500 at each of five to six points in an area of around two kilo-

metres at Mukterpur in Narayanganj. Besides these, we paid police at several points," he continued.

On the three-day journey, he paid police Tk 50 at Meghna Bridge, Tk 30 to Bajitpur police, Tk 20 to Sarail police, Tk 40 to Bhairab police, Tk 90 at two points to Banchhampur police and Tk 200 at two points to Narsingdi police, he claimed.

Talking to The Daily Star, Superintendent of Police Mir Rezaul Alam denied police involvement in extortion and claimed some people in the name of owners' and workers' associations are committing the crimes.

He said the police on January 28 arrested four such extortionists in Itna in the act of collecting toll.

During a visit to Shimrail ghat at Kanchpur, some

money receipts issued by lessees of BIWTA were found that did not mention the amount or purpose of realising the money.

BIWTA Deputy Director (Operations) Mohammad Sultan Ahmed said, "Lease holders have no right to realise toll when a water vessel crosses the river. But if it halts, loads or unloads goods at a lessee's area, the concerned lease holder is entitled to realise the government-fixed toll."

However, the receipt must mention the amount of toll and the purpose of it, he added.

Speaking anonymously, a BIWTA high official said as most of the lease holders are local ruling party men, they cannot take action against them in case of any violation of rules.

Banned party run from behind bars

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Prisons Brig Gen Ashrafur Islam Khan said this should not be the case as jammers were in place to block mobile calls to and from prison. He, however, admitted that some jammers had been out of order.

The Islamist outfit was outlawed for its subversive activities two years ago. It came back in the spotlight when the army recently pointed to its links to a foiled plot to topple the government.

The organisation on January 8 circulated provocative leaflets, based on fugitive Major Syed Ziaul Haq's internet message, across the country, the army said at a press conference on January 19.

Earlier in December, Hizb ut-Tahrir circulated English and Bangla leaflets calling them in case of any violation of rules.

Hasina from power and "establish Khilafat".

Lt Col Ziaul Ahsan, chief of Rab intelligence wing, told The Daily Star, "Our own sources as well as some detainees revealed during interrogation that the Tahrir men are carrying out their activities from jail."

"They stick with each other and discuss their next course of action. The leaders communicate with their activists outside over mobile phones."

The Rab intelligence chief suggested that the detained Tahrir men should be kept separated in different jails to prevent them from communicating with each other.

There have been allegations that a section of jail guards provides prisoners with mobile phones in exchange for money, though prisoners are not allowed to communicate with the outside world.

Almost all prisoners, except for those on death row, can move inside the jail area and meet during the day, said prison sources.

Intelligence officials in police and Rab have claimed that some activists of the banned outfit get arrested voluntarily so they can meet their leaders and discuss their next course of action.

These activists later come out of prison on bail and pass their leaders' instructions to other activists.

Monirul Islam, deputy commissioner of the Detective Branch of Police (South), said the law enforcers had identified some Tahrir leaders and activists who had got arrested voluntarily as part of a plan, and later got out of prison on bail.

Since the outfit had been banned on October 22, 2009, Rab and police arrested 500 of its leaders and activists,

including chief coordinator Mahiuddin Ahmed, and advisers Syed Golam Mawla, Mahmudul Bari, Towfiq and Kazi Morshedul Huq.

Intelligence personnel have said the banned outfit has adopted a new strategy to expand its network and influence.

Tahrir leaders are now trying to include professionals and top government officials in the outfit. They are also targeting children from wealthy families, the officials said.

Monirul said the banned outfit has been trying to get access to middle and upper-class families, and befriend them to build an influential network.

Rab intelligence chief Ziaul says Hizb ut-Tahrir has taken up a strategy to take advantage of influential and powerful people, including businessmen.

Rights given short shrift

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accommodation in a hotel, you are politely directed to the notice stuck to the entrance, which informs you the hotel is closed. Indeed, all hotels in the city have shut down for some days.

That is an unprecedented development. On the one hand, people who need a room and a bed for a night or two are quite at a loss as to where to go and find shelter. On the other, those who own or manage these hotels will simply have no earnings over these few days ahead because the authorities have decreed that they must not serve any citizen.

The government, without saying as much, has its reasons on offer. By having the hotels shut down, it aims at preventing the kind of chaos which the opposition BNP might be trying to foment on

March 12 as part of its Dhaka Cholo programme.

Behind these unspoken and therefore unspecified reasons are all the signs of panic on the part of the administration, of the kind which once nearly caused haemorrhage in what was then a BNP-Jamaat government a few years ago. The cause then was a mysterious and yet repeated threat by the then Awami League opposition to have the government fall by a particular date, in this instance April 30.

Back then, a hyperactive Lutfozzaman Babar, minister of state for home, made sure that the police swooped upon any citizen travelling to Dhaka from across the country. As many as 12,000 people were detained on the mere suspicion that they had been brought in to push

the government toward collapse. Basic human rights were given short shrift; and the piteous sight of the children and wives and siblings of these detained people crowding the gates of police stations and prisons to have their loved ones freed from the clutches of the state left searing images on the conscience of the nation.

History is now being repeated, albeit with a little more intensity. The roles have been reversed, with the Awami League, as the ruling party, now going after citizens in the belief that anyone approaching Dhaka from elsewhere in the country is a potential BNP supporter and therefore a troublemaker.

It is not just hotels but other areas of human activity which have come under the police dragnet. River

launches at Sadarghat have been requisitioned by the police, which means the rivers are eerily free of any transport movement. Buses have been seized by the police, which means the highways are bare and quiet.

There is a certain feeling that passengers on incoming trains might be subjected to police grilling at the gates of Kamalapur station about the purposes behind their journey to the capital. There is an instance of such behaviour already. Two individuals arriving in Dhaka from Comilla on Friday were met by the police at the bus stop and simply ordered to go back. Not until were the policemen persuaded into believing by the man hosting the two men that they were his guests were the offending visitors permitted to move

into the capital.

For its part, the BNP thinks March 12 will mark the beginning of change. There is a sense of irony in Khaleda Zia's warning to the government that it must not put democracy at stake by its repressive measures.

The revival and success of democracy were the goal behind the general elections of December 2008. That goal was put at risk when the opposition BNP decided to stay away from the Jatiya Sangsad. Democracy went into a state of coma. On March 12, it might get caught in the crossfire between a panicky government and a desperate opposition.

The nation, for its part, will stay behind closed doors. The streets will be empty. Political pluralism will be a subdued affair.

AL to warm up for Mar 12

FROM PAGE 1
immediate trial of war criminals and to resist any plot to foil it.

Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina yesterday at Gono Bhavan sat with her close associates, including Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury and Matia Chowdhury, to discuss measures for thwarting possible chaos.

"We will help the opposition if it follows democratic norms. But the government will not sit idle if they [BNP] resort to violence or harm people and their property," said Matia, agriculture minister and AL presidium member.

She said the ruling party men would help law enforcers maintain peace in the capital.

Sources in the party said the AL high command had already directed all its lawmakers in the capital and some adjacent districts to be ready to act in case of any

untoward incident.

"We will remain stand-by in all lanes and by-lanes of our constituencies," said a lawmaker from Dhaka preferring anonymity.

Highly placed government sources said the measures by the ruling party alongside that of the law enforcers have been taken to deal with the opposition men if they go for an indefinite sit-in in the capital.

Bangladesh Chhatra League, a pro-AL student body, has been asked to take the highest cautionary measures in all educational institutions, said sources.

Asked why the government and the ruling party are taking these measures, Matia said BNP resorted to violence in the name of a reception to freedom fighters on December 18 last year.

"We will take our own preparation so that BNP cannot repeat it. These measures would have been need-

less if the opposition did not go for violence and try to stage indefinite sit-in in the capital that day," she said, adding that before that December 18, the country's political atmosphere was normal.

On AL men taking position in lanes and by-lanes, Matia said, "Isn't it the right of the ruling party activists to keep the opposition men from exploding bombs here and there?"

AL Joint Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif alleged that the opposition's grand rally was aimed at saving war criminals and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's two corrupt sons Tarique Rahman and Arafat Rahman Koko.

According to him, possibilities were rife that BNP would create chaos in the name of grand rally. The government should consider imposing ban on BNP programmes to save people's lives and property, said Hanif.

MEMORIAL SUPPLEMENT

Messages from Japan

1 year from Great East Japan Earthquake

Our thoughts go out to the victims of the March 11 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and all people who have been affected by natural disasters around the world.

RECONSTRUCTION AND REVITALIZATION

The earthquake and its aftermath sharpened Japan's determination to secure revitalization and shared prosperity. In addition to the efforts for recovery and reconstruction from the earthquake, the nation is working towards new approaches to address the longstanding challenges - focused on enhancing innovation, cultivating domestic demand and drawing on global opportunities.

Japan's demographic and fiscal challenges are similar to, but sharper than, those faced by many developed countries. We are determined to take a lead in addressing these issues, leveraging the country's advanced and energy efficient technologies, and by addressing social security reform to ensure an equitable solution, for which there is growing national consensus.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Japan is grateful for the outpouring of support from the international community following last year's earthquake and its aftermath, and looks to enhanced cooperation to address the challenges of the global community.

Japan continues to be an attractive travel destination, offering international tourists cultural and culinary delights, as well as a wide range of outdoor activities. Japan also welcomes more investment and students from overseas.

Japan seeks to utilize the lessons learned through the earthquake and its aftermath to share best practice in crisis management, and directly support overseas counterparts if and when they are faced with similar challenges.

NUCLEAR POWER, RADIATION AND ENERGY

Safety continues to be a top priority. Japan has made substantial progress in addressing the situation - having brought the plant to a state of cold shutdown - and is following a concrete plan towards decommissioning. Ensuring the safe use of nuclear power as well as restoring confidence in the safety of Japanese food and other products remain the focus of government activities.

Japan is in the midst of a comprehensive review of its energy mix in order to pursue the optimum balance that ensures a safe, cost-effective, sustainable, and stable supply of energy.

Homepage of "Great East Japan Earthquake" at Prime Minister's Office of Japan and His Cabinet
<http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/incident/index.html>



Towards Open Reconstruction

We value the bond of friendship shown by the people of Bangladesh



Kizuna - Bondhon between Japan and Bangladesh

One of the strongest proofs of the strong bond of friendship, Kizuna in Japanese, or Bondhon in Bengali, existing between the two countries was seeing how the people of Bangladesh reacted to the Great East Japan Earthquake that occurred on March 11, 2011. The Japanese people have been grateful for the outpouring of support and encouragement from Bangladesh. Thanks to the kind support from Bangladesh, Japan's reconstruction has made steady progress. The affected areas, including their infrastructure and local economies, are firmly on their way to recovery. As Japan and Bangladesh jointly move forward toward a promising future, I would like to



H.E. Mr. Shiro Sadoshima, Ambassador of Japan to Bangladesh

take our bilateral relationship to a higher level through a dramatic expansion in Japan-Bangladesh economic ties, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. Thank you very much.