

BSF TORTURE Villagers reel from panic

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Tension remained high among the panic-stricken villagers of Kher Mamudpur in Birampur upazila following Indian Border Security Force (BSF) members' alleged intrusion, firing and torture on villagers Thursday night.

At least six people, including three women, were injured during the half-an-hour atrocities, claimed the villagers. Of them, one received injuries as the BSF personnel allegedly charged bayonet.

Four to five BSF personnel of Agra Camp under Dakkhin Dinajpur district of Paschim Bangla entered Kher Mamudpur village around 8:30pm crossing the border. They fired two shots in the air that created panic in the area.

They raided several houses and allegedly tried to break into homes using bayonets. As the locals protested, more 14 to 15 BSF jawans joined and started beating them up, the villagers claimed.

The BSF men also tried to drag two villagers, Md Shamsul Alam and Shaiful Islam, into Indian territory but they failed as the locals equipped with sticks chased them.

Before leaving the village around 9:00pm, the BSF personnel hurled a homemade bomb at the villagers which did not explode.

On Friday morning, BGB members of Bhaigarh camp recovered the bomb, said Md Moksed Ali Mondal, member of Katla Union Parishad.

The BGB protested BSF's intrusion, firing and torturing of the villagers at a company-level flag meeting late in Friday morning.

Contacted, Tayeb-Ul-Huq, commanding officer of Phulbari 40 Battalion, said the BSF members entered Bangladesh as they were chasing a group of smugglers.

100 buried

Experts have previously said that India has around 5,000 troops on the glacier, while Pakistan has less than half that number. Harsh weather and the high altitude claims many more lives than actual fighting over Siachen.

Kashmir is owned in part by both India and Pakistan, but claimed in full by each of the nuclear-armed rivals.

Siachen is close to four of the world's 14 peaks over 8,000 metres K2, Broad Peak, Gasherbrum I and Gasherbrum II all of which are on the Pakistani side of the frontline.

Fare hiked

A second class seat would cost Tk 450 instead of Tk 355 while a deck space would cost Tk 120 instead of Tk 95.

The new fares would still be much lower compared to those of the private passenger launches on the same route, claimed a BIWTC official.

Besides, each bus or truck will have to pay Tk 1,650 instead of Tk 1,320 on Paturia-Daulatdia ferry route, while Tk 2,100 instead of Tk 1,680 on Mawa-Charjanajata route.

Although the BIWTC has been making profits since 2001 with a net profit of around Tk 33 crore last year, the organisation incurred loss in its passenger vessel services, BIWTC Director (Commerce) Ananda Chandra Biswas told The Daily Star yesterday.

"If the fares are not revised, the BIWTC will have to incur loss," he added.

A BIWTC source, requesting anonymity, said its passenger vessels incur loss due to alleged corruption, increase in fuel prices and high operating and maintenance costs of old vessels.

Contacted, Saidur Rahman Rintu, president of Barisal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said an increase in ferry fares will lead to a rise in transport fares, which in turn will spike the prices of essentials.

DCC polls

FROM PAGE 20 secretaries will attend the day-long meeting at the Diploma Engineers Institution auditorium in the capital's Kakrail. Party Chairperson Khaleda Zia will chair the meeting.

After the inaugural session the central and grassroots level leaders will sit in a closed-door meeting to discuss organisational affairs.

Insiders said the issues of taking part in the upcoming Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) elections and the appointment of secretary general of the party might top the agenda in the committee meeting.

"Both the issues may come up in the discussion but the party's prime target is to prepare itself for the tougher anti-government movement," Rafiqul Islam Mia, member of the BNP standing committee, told The Daily Star.

A number of city unit leaders said they would raise the DCC elections issue in the meeting as they want to contest it in view of the declining popularity of the government.

However, former deputy minister Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, also president of Natore district unit BNP, said, "The only issue that will be discussed in the meeting is how we will force the government to quit power through a tougher movement."

BNP takes back

FROM PAGE 1 verdict of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) had mathematical deceptions, which they were not aware of before.

"We were confused by the massive [government] publicity of 'conquering the Bay of Bengal' and we extended our thanks without knowing details about the verdict. But after identifying the loopholes, we stand corrected," he said.

Mirza Fakhrul was speaking as the chief guest at a roundtable styled "Achievement and non-achievement through the verdict over maritime boundary with Myanmar" organised by Bangla daily Amar Desh at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh seminar room in Dhaka yesterday.

The government was trying to divert people's attention from critical issues like the crises of gas, electricity and water; killing of Bangladeshi people at the boarder, soaring prices of essentials and plummeting investment, he said.

"Ignoring these problems, the government is organising festivals over the issue of maritime boundary," said the BNP leader.

Claiming that Bangladesh failed to gain anything in the legal battle, Fakhrul alleged that the government did not make proper preparations to fight at the court. "Why renowned experts like Dr Kamal Hossain were not included in the process," he questioned.

Govt to form

FROM PAGE 1 to give back money to the victims of Jubo Karmasangthan Society (Jubok) scam, Muhith told reporters at his secretariat office after a meeting with Abdul Quadir, mayor of Camden, London.

"These organisations hold some assets. Our priority is to ensure that they cannot transfer the assets," he said.

The operation of Jubok was suspended in 2006 on charges of illegal banking. On Friday, the minister said, he went through the full report of the Bangladesh Bank on the Jubok scam. The officer concerned of his ministry has been instructed to take necessary action in the light of the report.

Muhith also said multi-level marketing companies and cooperatives are jointly taking away money from the public.

He said the central bank has no regulatory role to play for the cooperatives as they operate under a directorate.

The minister holds the directorate responsible for the mess. He also said a draft of direct sales act for MLM companies has been prepared.

The commerce ministry has proposed forming a separate body under this act to

Talking to The Daily Star, some senior leaders said they would also review the progress in implementing the decisions taken in the previous meetings.

The last meeting of the executive committee had decided to axe inactive leaders from the committee and make a list of the expendables. But its implementation is still pending.

The departmental secretaries of different were asked to submit reports to the secretary general as per the decisions taken in the last two meetings, but none complied with that.

Rafiqul Islam Mia, also a former minister, said the party needs to consider many things before slashing any leader from the committee.

"There are leaders who could not be present in party programmes but are very popular in their areas. This makes the axing really tough," he added.

The last meeting of the executive committee was held on April 23 last year. According to the party charter, the meeting of the committee must be held at least once in every six months. But the BNP high command could not convene the meeting timely, as the party was busy with organising road marches and rallies outside the capital.

He said the prime minister was using the maritime boundary verdict as a campaigning tool because she said Awami League would secure such "victory" with India in 2014, if voted to power again, said the BNP leader.

The maritime boundary dispute with India is scheduled to be solved by an international arbitration court in 2014.

The government has cheated the people on such a large scale over the last three years that people have lost faith in the government, he claimed.

Amar Desh Editor Mahmudur Rahman chaired the roundtable while former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University Prof Emazuddin Ahmed, veteran journalist Ataus Samad, columnist Farhad Mazhar, Supreme Court Bar Association President Zainul Abedin and its former president Khandker Mahbob Hossain also spoke.

While presenting a paper, master mariner Capt M Rezaul Karim Chowdhury claimed that Myanmar has gained victory through the verdict, not Bangladesh.

However, law professor of Dhaka University Asif Nazrul strongly protested the claim saying, "Both the countries have a win-win situation."

The ITLOS on March 14 delivered the verdict which upheld Bangladesh's claim of 200-nautical miles exclusive economic and territorial rights in the Bay of Bengal rejecting the claims of Myanmar, experts have said.

which the finance ministry has objected, he added.

Muhith said there was no need for a separate body; the MLM companies could be regulated by making the directorate of cooperatives stronger.

Last month, on instructions of finance ministry, Bangladesh Bank sent a detailed report on Destiny 2000 Ltd to the finance ministry, raising allegation of illegal banking against the organisation.

DUDEMO Over a hundred Dhaka University students yesterday formed a human chain near the Teacher-Student Centre, demanding immediate steps to stop all kinds of "fraudulent activities" by Destiny and other MLM companies.

The students urged the government to form a commission to investigate the activities of MLM companies and to realise compensation for the victims, said Muhammad Sahabuddin Sheikh, a third year student of Institute of Fine Arts.

Students also said distributors of MLM should be brought to justice for trying to lure DU students into the business by saying "not higher study, only MLM can reduce poverty".

Muhith defends experts' list on Tipai

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Finance Minister AMA Muhith yesterday defended a list sent to India in February of ten Bangladeshi experts to conduct a joint study on Tipaimukh dam project.

The list excluded renowned experts like Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury and Prof Ainun Nishat.

Justifying the team formation, Muhith yesterday argued, "Many people are criticising the list of experts but the fact is some of the renowned experts (who are excluded) are engaged in other works so they cannot make time for the study."

The ten-member team is mostly comprised of government officials from ministries of water resources and foreign affairs, the Water Development Board, the Centre for Environment and Geographical Information Services and the Institute of Water Modelling.

The finance minister was making his points on the issue before journalists at his secretariat office yesterday.

The government sent the list in response to a proposal by India but has not yet received any reply.

Muhith also said there were two segments in the Tipaimukh dam project--one for building a reservoir for generating electricity and the other for construction of a dam.

Govt 'shifts'

FROM PAGE 20 On Friday night, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the Padma Bridge would be constructed with Malaysian fund and an MoU in this regard would be signed on April 10. She was speaking at a meeting of the Awami League Central Working Committee.

Her announcement came three days after the WB suspended a unit of Canadian company SNC-Lavalin from bidding in WB-funded projects. The unit, identified in a Canadian newspaper as the engineering firm's Bangladesh subsidiary, had bid for supervisory consultancy of the project, which involved \$50 million.

Amid uncertainty over the mega project, Finance Minister AMA Muhith had said the agreement with the WB and the other donors would have to be withdrawn or cancelled before the government made another funding agreement. Senior officials were in talks with WB officials to resolve the impasse.

Sources in the communications ministry said the government might send a letter to the WB in a day or two, scrapping its loan agreement.

"It's not complicated to scrap an agreement. The government can do it if it does not want to take the WB loan and goes for other funding," a senior official said seeking anonymity.

Meanwhile, economists said the Malaysian offer would be costly for Bangladesh, as it would put tougher conditions for providing the fund.

They also said that if it were the World Bank, the government would repay the loan at 0.75 percent interest in 40 years. Moreover, Bangladesh would get a 10-year grace period for paying off the loan.

However, sources in the ministry's Bridges Division described the MoU signing as a major development, saying that this step would open up an opportunity for Bangladesh to get Malaysian funds for the Padma bridge project.

They said a draft of the MoU had been prepared, according to which the two countries agreed to cooperate in the bridge construction.

"After signing of the MoU, we will begin negotiations with Malaysia on some crucial issues like the total cost of constructing the bridge, the time Bangladesh will get to pay off the debt, construction period and toll to be fixed for different vehicles," a Bridges Division official said.

He added that the present government would try to settle all these issues as quickly as possible, so it could start the construction work before the expiry of its tenure. The deal with Malaysia will be finalised only if both the countries can reach an agreement.

The region is Ctg's oyster

FROM PAGE 1 Mumbai port with a view to making the zone a vehicle for the transformation of the regional economy.

"This could also be our model as the SEZ has been identified as an engine of growth," he said, adding that the Indian authorities were building the zone under public private partnership (PPP).

According to Khan, the SEZ could be built on the banks of the Karnaphuli River and extended to Cox's Bazar and thereon to the proposed deep seaport at Sonadia.

"It would be much beneficial for us," he said, suggesting that a tunnel be built under the Karnaphuli.

In 1995, Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica) identified Chittagong as an area with great potential for an economic zone and its prospects of emerging as a major regional economic hub serving China, Myanmar and north-east India.

Citing Japanese investors' attempt to relocate factories from Thailand and China, he said a Japanese SEZ should be permitted to be set up in Chittagong.

"Japan can be a real development partner for Bangladesh in terms of factory relocation," he said, suggesting that measures be taken to develop the coastal belt.

Prof Muinul Islam of the economics department at Chittagong University said Chittagong and the coastal belt were a golden goose for Bangladesh.

Citing China's interest in helping Bangladesh build the deep seaport, he said India did not take this positively due to geopolitical reasons. "We have

to handle the two countries carefully," he added.

"Chittagong can serve the whole region -- South China, Myanmar, north-east India, Nepal and Bhutan. But an infrastructure and a deep seaport are needed to be built for this," said Prof MA Taslim, chairman of the Department of Economics at Dhaka University.

"There is no city in the region having the kind of potential Chittagong has. If we miss the chance Myanmar will snatch it," said Prof Taslim, noting that after the election in Myanmar, foreign investors were keen on investing in that country.

"If we can start building the deep seaport now, we can take the advantage," he said.

Prof Taslim said Bangladesh needed big markets for its growth and that is why trade was a priority. Establishment of connectivity was necessary so that goods and services could move and thus boost trade.

"Connectivity creates the opportunity for trade and free movement of goods and services," he said, adding that a lack of understanding on connectivity had created confusion over transit and connectivity.

As per international norms, Bangladesh was not required to give transit to India for carrying goods between its mainland and its northeastern states, Prof Taslim continued, but for a country such as Bhutan, it was obligatory to give the country access to the sea.

"If Bangladesh fails to build the deep seaport within five to 10 years, Myanmar is likely to take

the geographical advantage," said M Shahidul Islam, visiting research fellow of the Institute of Governance Studies at Brac University.

Referring to a study, he said global growth would take place somewhere between India and China in the next 30 years and Chittagong also has the potential.

Syed Mahmudul Huq, chairman of Bangladesh Myanmar Business Promotion Council, said the port city used to be known as the big port in 14th century China.

The deep seaport would not be viable only through facilitating overseas trade of the northeast India.

"We need China and Myanmar," he said, adding that the SEZ would have to be built centering on the deep seaport. Huq favoured improvement in bilateral ties with Myanmar.

Former commerce minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury said before any law was framed, priority should be given to land utilisation as land has become scarce in the country.

On the SEZ, he said studies should be conducted on whether the SEZ would be beneficial if it were set up under the PPP or solely by the government.

The BNP leader also criticised the Dhaka-centric development in industrialisation and economic growth. Prospects of each district should be considered in economic planning.

On Myanmar, he said a holistic approach was needed to build stronger ties with the neighbouring country.

Army man held

FROM PAGE 20 microbus overtook theirs and halted them.

Getting down from the vehicle, the gang of about six men introduced themselves as detectives and ordered the traders to get off.

Iqbal handcuffed Monirul while his accomplices started beating the three others up on allegation of carrying illegal money.

At one stage they snatched Tk 7 lakh from Monirul and Tk 8 lakh from Tanvir at gunpoint.

Sensing danger, the victims started screaming for help.

A police patrol and locals, hearing the scream, approached the spot.

The ring put trader Tanvir in their microbus and sped away.

They however could not take their cohort Iqbal with them as he was handcuffed together with Monirul.

Police recovered Tk 45,000 from the army man, while his cohorts managed to escape with the rest of the money.

"We brought Iqbal to the police station and verified his identity with his ID card.

In the morning some army officials came and confirmed his identity," said Abdul Malek, officer-in-charge of Darussalam Police Station.

Police have received Iqbal's phone call list and his cohorts will be identified soon, he added.

Meanwhile, law enforcers yesterday produced the army man before a Dhaka Court seeking a five-day remand in two cases filed in this connection.

While police was waiting for the remand hearing, the army authorities prayed the court to hand Iqbal over to them.

The court later granted army's prayer. Contacted, officials at Bangladesh Army's Inter Services Public Relations directorate refused to make any comment on the matter.

In another incident in the capital's Kalabagan yesterday, muggers in guise of detectives riding a microbus took away Tk 1 lakh from Jahangir Alam, while his cohorts managed to escape with the rest of the money.

Sub-inspector Nazmul Ahsan of Dhanmondi Police Station confirmed the incident.

Rights chief

FROM PAGE 20 He was addressing a daylong conference on human rights as the chief guest at a hotel in the town.

The NHRC chief also noted that he could sue the inspector general of prisons over the incident but decided against it as the incident had created massive awareness among the people.

Most of the people do not even know the difference between human rights and a criminal offence, mentioned Mizanur adding, the state should take an initiative to let its people know about this in order to improve the human rights situation.

Besides, the media can play a significant role to this end, he observed.

He urged all to respect the dignity of human beings.

NGO, hosted the event as part of its project Transparency for Human Rights in Bangladesh.

Deputy Commissioner of Bogra Sarwar Mahmud, Additional Superintendent of Police Mohammad Abdul Warish, lawmakers Shefali Khatun and Mostafa Ali Mukul, former MP Kamrunnahr Putul, lawyers Mir Iqbal Hossen and Sadrul Anam Ranju and Country Director of Relief International Nazrul Islam addressed the conference, among others.

Journalists from Bogra, Thakurgaon, Rajshahi and Rangpur, local lawyers, political leaders and civil society members attended the meeting.

Mizanur went to Sylhet Central Jail to see if the human rights of the inmates were protected. But the jail authorities had denied him entry to the

A general diary was filed with the police station in this connection.

Rare air strike in Abyei

AFP, Khartoum, Sudan

A rare air strike has occurred in the Abyei region contested by Sudan and South Sudan, injuring one woman, the United Nations humanitarian agency (OCHA) said in a weekly report monitored yesterday.

The UN said it was the first reported aerial bombing in the Abyei area since last June, when Khartoum and southern officials signed an agreement to demilitarise the area along their disputed border.

Four bombs were dropped on March 31 in Um Khariet, OCHA said in its online report, which cited UN peacekeepers based in Abyei.

OCHA, in its weekly bulletin for Sudan, said humanitarian agencies "are extremely concerned" that the bombing will negatively affect the return of displaced people north of the Bahr el Arab/Kiir River and the peace process in Abyei.

No need to notify govt on troop movement

Says Army chief

PTI, New Delhi

Army Chief Gen V K Singh yesterday dismissed reports of "unusual" movement of two elite units of army towards the capital in mid-January calling it "routine" for which there was no need to "notify" the government.

"Notify for what? What was happening? We keep doing this so many times," he told 'The Hindu' when asked if the army had notified the government on the movement of the two units.

An Indian Express report on Wednesday on the troop movement on the night of January 16-17, the day the army chief had approached the Supreme Court on the age issue, had created a furore that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Defence Minister A K Antony had rubbished it as "alarmist" and "baseless".

To a question whether the government had sought a clarification on the January 16 movement of troops, Gen Singh said, "It was not like that. No clarification was asked for. These were routine issues. I don't think one or two units ever bother anyone. It was not as if the whole of the armoured division was marching towards Delhi. This is just a figment of imagination."

RU student

FROM PAGE 20 friend of Sharmin's brother in the port city.

The two were rushed to Chittagong Medical College Hospital in critical condition where doctors declared them dead around 1:00am yesterday.

After finishing her written exams a few days ago, Sharmin along with her mother went to visit her elder brother, an army personnel residing in Chittagong cantonment.

Family sources said burial of the deceased would be held at their village home in Natore today.

Journalists

FROM PAGE 20 Hours earlier they met Home Minister Shahara Khatun at her Baily Road residence around 12:00noon on her invitation for tea.

According to meeting sources, the minister made the same old pledges saying that police would arrest the killers very soon as the law enforcers have made remarkable progress in investigation.

She, however, did not elaborate further on the said progress.

Meanwhile, law enforcers are yet to announce any development or make any arrest in this respect.

Sagar Sarowar, news editor at private TV channel Maasranga, and his wife Meherun Runi, senior reporter of ATN Bangla, were killed in the wee hours on February 11 at their rented apartment in the city's West Rajabazar.

Shahara at the meeting directed police to ensure security of the journalists and stop harassment so that they can discharge their duty uninterrupted, the sources said.

The minister also directed reinvestigation into all the cases regarding murder of journalists including that of Humayun Kabir Balu, Manik Saha and Sheikh Belal.

BFUJ Presidents Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury and Ruhul Amin Gazi, BFUJ General Secretaries Abdul Jalil Bhuiyan and M Abdullah (acting), DUJ Presidents Abdus Shahid and Omar Faruq, DUJ General Secretaries Mohammad Baker Hossain and Shaban Mahmud, National Press Club's General Secretary Sayed Abdul Ahmed and DRU President Shakhawat Hossain Badsha and General Secretary Sajjad Alam Khan Tapu were present at the meeting with the home minister.