

Dalai Lama laments latest Tibetan self-immolations

AFP, Long Beach

The Dalai Lama voiced sadness Friday at the reported self-immolation of two more Tibetans, the latest in a wave of such protests against Beijing's rule.

But the Tibetan spiritual leader was cautious of further comment, because the issue was "very political" -- and also reiterated that he saw positive signs of reforms from Chinese leaders.

"It is very very sad," he said, when asked about the latest two self-immolations in a restive southwestern region of China, reported by human rights in groups.

BNP prepares

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BNP standing committee members Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain and Nazrul Islam Khan, and Convener of Dhaka City Unit of the party Sadeque Hossain Khoka, among others, were present at the talks.

Meanwhile, acting BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir alleged the government had "abducted" Ilias to divert people's attention from the recent Tk 70 lakh scandal.

"The government has abducted our leader Ilias Ali at a time when it is taking flak from people following the seizure of a huge amount of bribe money from the assistant personal secretary of former railway minister Suranjit Sengupta," he said at a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club in the capital.

The party's Lalbagh unit organised the discussion to protest the "forced disappearance" of Ilias Ali, BNP organising secretary (Sylhet Division).

The government attracted strong criticism from people after Suranjit was made minister without portfolio following his resignation as railway minister, said the BNP leader.

Fakhrul said the ruling party has resorted to "abduction and secret killings" to eliminate its political opponents. He called upon party leaders to wage tougher movement against the government.

He also criticised Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's comment on Ilias Ali's disappearance. "She [Hasina] has termed the disappearance a drama. The indication is clear: she has turned into a dreaded force."

He also urged opposition leaders and activists to get prepared for observing today's hartal.

Brow-raising

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users and people criticised it.

ACC Commissioner (investigation) Justice Mohammad Sahabuddin, a former High Court judge, however, said he went to Kuakata beach in Patuakhali with his childhood friend, the company chief, because he had never been there.

"Apart from my friend's request [to tag along], I actually requested him earlier to take me along with him as I had never gone to Kuakata," said Commissioner Sahabuddin while talking to The Daily Star via telephone.

"Being a justice, I always get protocol on security grounds... whether the tour is official or unofficial," he said.

He said his friend had purchased some land there.

Kolapara Police Station Officer-in-Charge Ishaq Ali told The Daily Star that the helicopter landed at Rakhain Market around 11:00am and left around 2:30pm.

"During this time, the private company chief and his companies were at the rest house of Water Development Board in Kolapara and a local hotel," the policeman said.

Talking to The Daily Star, ACC Chairman Ghulam Rahman said, "I was not informed of the visit of Commissioner Sahabuddin. He had not informed me of the matter."

"Ask him. He is a responsible person."

The private tour of the commissioner came to light when photos of the chopper in Kuakata were published on social network website facebook.com. The initial post was shared by others on facebook and soon it spread and comments on his getting protocol on a private tour started pouring in.

Public woes

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Akhtaruzzaman, executive engineer of Wasa.

Last month, Wasa dug up roads No-86, 90, 92, 94, 96, 104, 113, 118, 123 and 126 of the area all at a time. This significantly narrowed down the motorways with trenches on one side and large concrete pipe kept on the other side occupying most to the road span.

So, vehicles on the roads are forced to run through one narrow lane on each side triggering huge traffic congestion in the area.

Asked about the work strategy, Akhtaruzzaman said the concrete pipes were so heavy that it would have been difficult for them to keep the pipes elsewhere and bring them to the site when needed.

Sitara Chowdhury, a resident of road-126, said the Wasa did not issue them any notice prior to digging up the road in front of their house.

"My husband could not go to the office by car for a week due to the road digging. I wonder what would have happened if we needed to move out in an emergency had anyone fallen sick," she said.

During the development work, the Wasa had to put around 100 large concrete pipes on one side of the Gulshan Avenue for a month as they did not have the permission to dig the road from the traffic department.

MIRPUR
The Wasa dug up a large portion of Darussalam Road, stretching from Mirpur to Technical intersection, nearly four months ago to lay storm sewer line but the work remains suspended due to the ongoing water pipeline work along Mirpur road.

Rukhsana Begum, a roadside vendor on Darussalam Road, said traffic movement there came to a complete standstill every day during the peak hours.

Hamidur Rahman, a commuter from Mirpur, said traffic gridlock due to the narrowed down road had been causing unbearable suffering to the commuters for the last several months.

During rush hours it took hours to pass through Mirpur-1 to Asad Gate, as the road had been dug in the middle for the work underground, he added.

Another project for second Sayedabad water treatment plant and installation of a 10-km supply pipelines has also added to the suffering.

War crimes trial

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humanity by BNP leader Salauddin Quader Chowdhury in 1971.

Their trip came as part of the preparation for the trial against Salauddin which is scheduled to start on April 29.

After arriving in Chittagong Thursday night, the investigation team talked to local people, leaders and victims' families, advocate Rana Das Gupta, a member of the ICT team, said at a press conference yesterday evening.

They will spend one more day here in connection with the case against Salauddin while one or two members of the team will stay on for a few more days to probe into another case. He, however, declined to name the other accused in the other case.

"We gained a lot of experience while investigating the case against Jamaat-e-Islami leader Delwar Hossain Sayedee in the last one and a half years," said Rana. Prosecutors and investigators are now more confident about the trials of other cases, including the one against SQ Chowdhury, he said.

They are fully prepared for the trial against Salauddin and want to complete it in the shortest possible time, Rana said with an assurance that the trial would be fair.

Chief Coordinator of the investigation Abdul Hannan Khan said a section was trying to obstruct the trial against SQ Chowdhury.

The accused has so far moved as many as 97 petitions only to delay the trial, he said, adding that the BNP leader might have realised

Under the Tk 1,400-crore project funded by DANIDA and the government, the Wasa is laying a 5.5-km pipeline digging the Mirpur Road between Technical intersection and Panthapath.

Two-kilometre water pipeline from Tibbot in Tejgaon Industrial Area to the national shooting federation and a 2.5-km from Rampura to Malibagh are also under the project.

Site officials said it would take until June to finish the digging work.

Shahid Uddin, superintendent engineer of Wasa Drainage Circle, said a 12-kilometre work for laying storm-water pipeline started in Uttara, Mirpur, Dhanmondi, Mouchak, Shahjahanpur, Moghbazar more than two months ago and the job was to be completed by mid-May.

DHANMONDI AND UTTARA
The Wasa dug 3.5-km stretch of Dhanmondi roads No-5, 6, 7 and 9 in February to lay storm sewer lines. The work completed in a month but the DCC is yet to repair the roads.

The same length of road has been dug in Uttara and it will continue until mid-May.

Taqsem A Khan, managing director of Wasa, said they had to start digging the roads at this time of the year as DCC (north and south) permits it from November to May.

DCC officials admitting the public suffering said different agencies get project approval at different times and therefore coordination in the road-digging work was not possible.

It is true that DCC in some cases delayed in repairing the dug-up roads, they said, but for Gulshan they had started the repair work immediately after the Wasa finished its work.

Prof Shamsul Hoque of civil engineering department at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology said since neighbourhoods like Gulshan had been developed in an unplanned manner -- without building proper utility networks -- public suffering is inevitable.

The Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) is responsible for the unplanned development, even in the cases of Uttara and Purbachal schemes, where underground utility network was not ensured before developing the housing plots, said experts.

Containers

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973 TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units) containers, berthed at the jetty No 13 of Chittagong Port around 1:00pm on Friday.

A government intelligence agency on that day verbally informed the CPA authorities about their suspicion and asked the port officials not to deliver the consignments without examination.

Contacted, CPA Secretary Syed Farhad Uddin Ahmed confirmed receiving such a directive from an intelligence agency.

The customs officials in presence of CPA and intelligence officials will check the containers today and tomorrow, mentioned Lt Col Moazzem.

All the containers have been removed from the vessel in the last two days and kept in different yards according to the directives from the port authority, Md Amiruzzaman, manager of berth operator M/s Bashir Ahmed, told The Daily Star.

Export containers are being loaded in the ship, he added.

Saiful Islam, manager of the vessel's local agent Seacon Limited, said they came to know about the port authority's decision, but were yet to receive any notice from the CPA.

HSC exams

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May 9 while those under the technical board on May 2, said a handout of the education ministry.

The decision was made at an inter-board coordination committee meeting yesterday. "All the examinations for Sunday [today] under all the boards have been postponed due to hartal called by opposition," said the statement.

However, the following examinations under all the boards will be held as per earlier schedule. Around 9.26 lakh examinees are appearing in the HSC and equivalent examinations that began on April 1.

BNP on Thursday called for the countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal in protest against the alleged "disappearance" of former lawmaker and BNP Organising Secretary for Sylhet Division M Ilias Ali.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid the same day urged the opposition to reconsider their programme.

Earlier, Thursday's HSC examinations under Sylhet Board and Technical Education Board were deferred due to a hartal in Sylhet called by the opposition BNP on the same ground.

Doubts

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Information and Cultural Affairs Minister Abul Kalam Azad that "Bangladesh is proud of IR Iran's nuclear achievements and capabilities."

Azad reportedly made the comment in a meeting with Iran's Culture Minister Syed Mohammad Hosseini on the sideline of OIC-sponsored conference, underway in Liberville, of information ministers from the Islamic world.

IRNA also quoted Azad as saying: "The official called for the use of Islamic Republic of Iran's experiences in all fields including the fields of education, research and cultural affairs."

Iran's culture minister for his part asked for the Muslim countries' united action against the ongoing Islamophobia which aims to show a bad face of Islam, the IRNA reports.

Contacted, high officials at the ministries of information and foreign affairs expressed their strong doubt over the statement and said the IRNA must have misquoted the Bangladesh information minister.

They said Bangladesh strongly follows the United Nations rules and only supports peaceful usages of nuclear energy. So the question of supporting Iran's "controversial" nuclear achievements and capabilities does not arise at all.

The officials said they are trying to establish contact with Azad to know what actually he said and would come up with an official statement soon.

Roadside tea-stall owners, vendors or road construction workers said they had not seen the fire start.

Question over Rab raid

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Rab said it took Ilias' wife Tahsina Rushtir with them during the operation.

But Tahsina told reporters last night that she did not go anywhere with Rab, raising questions about the joint raid.

She made the comment after meeting BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at the latter's Gulshan office at around 10:45pm.

Earlier, BNP activists resorted to vandalising vehicles and arson that cost a bus driver his life on the eve of today's hartal to protest the disappearance of BNP leader Ilias Ali.

Talking to reporters, Tahsina said, "I did not accompany members of law enforcement agencies during their drive. I am tired."

BNP insiders told this correspondent that Ilias' wife informed the BNP chief about the discussions between her and law enforcers over her husband's disappearance.

"She [Ilias' wife] called on madam [Khaleda Zia] and talked about his husband's disappearance," acting BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir told The Daily Star last night without giving any details.

Asked about the operation, Rab Commander Sohail said, "Ilias Ali's wife phoned us in the afternoon and told us that an unknown person over the phone gave her information about her husband's whereabouts."

Quoting Ilias' wife, Sohail said: "He was kept confined in a house at Pubail, Gazipur."

Rab and police searched a two-storey building and the surrounding areas at around 5:00pm but could not trace Ilias or his driver.

Ilias Ali, former lawmaker and BNP organising secretary, and his driver Ansar Ali went missing on April 17 night from city's Banani area.

During the sporadic pre-hartal violence yesterday, hartal supporters torched six buses in the capital and vandalised 10 vehicles in Sylhet, the hometown of Ilias. The violence on the streets sent a wave of panic among city dwellers and elsewhere in the country.

Police also arrested seven leaders and activists of BNP during a clash in Dohar on the outskirts of the capital yesterday morning.

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday asked her top leaders to stay active during hartal hours today. Her party believes that Ilias was picked up by a government agency.

BNP acting secretary general Fakhrul Islam Alamgir also called upon party activists to make today's hartal a tough one and warned the government that they would declare non-stop hartals if it tried to prevent the hartal from being observed today.

Bus was parked

FROM PAGE 1
Khilgaon yesterday on the eve of the opposition-called hartal.

Nine more buses, including three with passengers, were torched at Mirpur-1 and 10, Baridhara, Azimpur, Abdullahpur Beribadh, Gulistan, Darus Salam, Farmgate and near Bahadur Shah Park, fire brigade officials said. The latest was around 8:15pm.

Police identified the ill-fated bus driver as Badar Ali Beg, 48. They took the injured, Abdul Motaleb, 26, to Khilgaon Police Station for interrogation.

Motaleb, who suffered burns on his neck and back of his head, told The Daily Star that the two were sleeping on the isle in the afternoon; Motaleb was closer to the doors. Excessive heat woke him up, and seeing fire and smoke, he jumped out of a window. All the doors were locked.

For the moment, he had forgotten that Badar was inside, he said.

None in the area could say how and by whom the bus was set on fire.

Roadside tea-stall owners, vendors or road construction workers said they had not seen the fire start.

Components of the recently formed BNP-led 18-party alliance also extended their support to the hartal.

Despite the prime minister's directive and BNP's mounting pressure, the law enforcers were able to make no progress in locating Ilias, a BNP organising secretary, and his driver Ansar Ali who appeared to have been abducted from Banani in the wee hours of April 18. Police found the car of Ilias abandoned near his Banani home.

Unidentified hartal supporters around 2:15pm yesterday set fire to an inter-district bus parked near Khidmah Hospital at Khilgaon. The driver of the bus, Badar Ali, 42, was taking a nap inside. He died, Khilgaon police told The Daily Star.

"The driver was sleeping and was burned alive inside his vehicle and the helper sustained minor burn injuries as pro-hartal supporters set fire to the bus," a witness told The Daily Star.

Six more buses were torched -- one near Eden College at Azimpur, one at Abdullahpur Beribadh, one at Gulistan, one at Victoria Park near Sadarghat, one at Darussalam and another at Farmgate Police Box, fire brigade officials said.

The capital's busy areas looked a lot less busy yesterday with city dwellers worried over pre-hartal violence. There were hardly any traffic jams in congestion-prone areas of the capital yesterday afternoon.

The number of public vehicles on the street was very small, especially in the evening when bus owners took their vehicles off service fearing vandalism and torching of vehicles. Many city dwellers were seen stranded at bus stops waiting for transport.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Benazir Ahmed said law enforcement agencies would take a strong stance to fend off any violence during hartal hours today.

He was talking to reporters after holding a meeting on the security measures during hartal with top police officials at Rajarbagh Police Lines.

He said, "We will do anything necessary for ensuring security of the people." Special Weapons and Tactics (Swat) unit under the Detective Branch of police would also be deployed to maintain law and order, he said.

In Dohar, on the outskirts of the capital, police arrested seven BNP leaders and activists during a clash between BNP men and police. The BNP Dohar unit had brought out a procession protesting the disappearance of Ilias Ali.

Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Dohar Police Station, said the clash

erupted around 10:00am when the BNP men brought out the procession defying police resistance.

At one stage police charged truncheons on them, the OC said.

In Sylhet, opposition activists after a rally vandalised at least 10 vehicles at the city's Zindabazar-Chouhatta area yesterday afternoon.

The district and city units of BNP had brought out a procession from the court area around 4:30pm which ended at Chouhatta with a rally.

After the rally, a group of young men resorted to vandalism on the road between Chouhatta and Zindabazar, witnesses said. Panic-stricken shopkeepers closed shops immediately.

However, police reached the scene later on and prevented further trouble.

Around 2,000 BNP activists brought out a procession from Biswanath upazila in Sylhet. The procession paraded four kilometres on Dhaka-Sylhet highway at Rashidpur. The BNP activists also barricaded the highway for about 20 minutes around 5:00pm causing a serious traffic jam. They vandalised a truck there.

Meanwhile, during a press conference at the Jatiya Press Club, Bangladesh Motor Drivers Dal, a pro-BNP professional drivers' organisation, demanded that the government returns Ilias' driver Ansar Ali and Omar Faruq, driver of former railways minister Suranjit Sengupta's former assistant personal secretary, who had been missing since April 9.

\$1 million

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ABC News reports that the rare penny is made of copper with a small silver plug at its centre. It was an experiment by the then-fledgling US Mint, which shelved the penny before it could go into mass circulation. The US Mint determined the penny was too large and heavy for practical use.

Todd Imhof at Heritage Auctions said the copper-silver penny reads "Liberty Parent of Science & Industry". "With collectible items, for an item to sell for over a million dollars it is an unusual event," he said.

"At the time, industry and science reflected an enlightenment mindset," he said. "People believed freedom of thought and industrial growth would bind and unify the new country, not religion or God."

An anonymous collector who has owned the coin for 10 years sold the penny.

However, Imhof said a coin of the same type sold for close to \$3 million over a year ago. Still, the \$1.15 million sale is one of only 30 \$1 million-plus coin sales in history.

Complainant

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journalists that his father was taking treatment at Sylhet Osmani Medical College Hospital.

However, Basharat was not found at the hospital yesterday, and his mobile phone was switched off.

On Thursday, Basharat told The Daily Star over the phone that he had filed the complaints with police long ago, but those were recorded as cases 11 years later.

Asked, Basharat denied any pressure from the ruling Awami League men to file the cases.

Sylhet Superintendent of Police Shakhawat Hossain confirmed recording of the cases -- one for vandalism and the other under the explosive substances act. But he could not say why the cases were recorded so late.

Denying Basharat's claim of lodging the complaints long ago, Abul Kalam Azad, officer-in-charge of Biswanath Police Station, said the complaints were lodged and also recorded as cases on the same day.

Free media

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the print and electronic media on various issues.

The newspaper, to be named 'Dainik Paschimanga', would use the press of now-defunct Bengali daily 'Basumati', once a premier newspaper in the state, Mamata told reporters in Kolkata.

The TV channel, styled 'Paschimanga', would be located at Roopkala Kendra which has infrastructure for production of documentaries on development issues of different government departments.

"This [Roopkala Kendra] will be revised for highlighting the performance of various government departments," she said.

Earlier, speaking at a government officers' convention here, the Trinamool Congress chief said, "The government work is not being highlighted properly [in media]. We need our own news channel and paper to inform the people."

She said the media was more focused on "negative" news about the government and did not highlight the good work done.

Meanwhile, Mamata, picked by Time as one of the 100 most influential people of the world, has been invited by the magazine to a gala dinner in New York on April 24.

"It will be a gala black tie formal dinner where the who's who will be present. The invitation was received by the chief minister's office yesterday [Friday]," a source close to the chief minister said yesterday.

"She is unlikely to make the trip to New York because of her work schedule in Bengal," a Trinamool Congress spokesperson said.

Mamata shares space on the Time magazine's list with US President Barack Obama, billionaire investor Warren Buffet, Pakistan's first Oscar winner Sharmeen Obaid Chinoy, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg.

Oppose

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sectors affecting the livelihoods of its people.

To address a problem of this magnitude effectively, national unity and political consensus are a must.

Experts, academics and environmentalists yesterday expressed these views at separate programmes on the Indian project that has caused widespread concern in Bangladesh which shares as many as 54 rivers with the upper riparian neighbour.

The Centre for Sustainable Development (CSD) held a seminar on "India's river linking project and Bangladesh" at the Cirdap auditorium in the capital and Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) organised a citizen's rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club.

Speaking at the seminar, former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury stressed national unity and political consensus to protect the country's interest.

Dhaka University Professor Mahmabullah said there are disagreements over the river-linking project even in India. Bangladesh government should focus on that to mount pressure on Indian government to cancel the project.

Presenting the keynote paper at the seminar, Taushidul Anwar Khan, former member of Indo-Bangla Joint Rivers Commission (JRC), said the Indian project will be a threat to the existence of Bangladesh.

The existing ground water in southwestern region of Bangladesh will be polluted by salinity due to drastic reduction of dry season discharges, he said.

Jahangirnagar University former professor Dilara Chowdhury and Brac University teacher Pias Karim were among the other speakers at the seminar, chaired by CSD President M Anwar Hasim and moderated by its Secretary General Mahfuz Ullah.

Speakers at the citizen's rally emphasised building national unity through dialogues among political parties, experts, environmentalists and others to effectively press the demand for cancellation of the Indian project.

Meanwhile, the Indian Supreme Court on February 27 ordered implementation of the mega project in a "time-bound manner".

The project involves linking 30 major rivers and diverting the Ganges and the Brahmaputra waters.