

22 BNP men get HC bail

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Talking to party leaders at her Gulshan office on Tuesday night, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia asked them not to engage in any confrontation with the law enforcers at the moment.

She discussed the street violence and wanted to know the reason behind the clashes.

Party insiders said the leaders threw salvos of accusation at each other regarding the violence.

Some leaders said staging an instant demonstration protesting the attack on Mirza Abbas's motorcade was not a right decision. They blamed the protesters for putting the party in trouble.

Leaders close to Abbas, however, insisted that such a demonstration is not new. They claimed that the jeep which was torched during the clashes was a government vehicle and no BNP leader and worker were beside the car. They accused the "government's men" of the arson.

Upon hearing the news that BNP leader Mirza Abbas's motorcade came under attack in Netrakona, opposition activists fought pitched battles with the law enforcers in Nayapaltan

and Kakrail on Tuesday. They torched three vehicles and vandalised at least 20 others during the clashes.

Following the incident, police filed three cases against over 500 opposition leaders and activists.

Since then the accused leaders were staying at the Nayapaltan office to avoid arrest. Law enforcers besieged the office and some plainclothes members of the Detective Branch took position at the office gate.

They arrested Jubo Dal President Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal on Wednesday noon from Bijoynagar intersection. But some leaders including acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir were allowed to enter the office on Wednesday as they were not accused in the cases.

After staying overnight at the office, the accused leaders except for Sarafat Ali Safu went to the High Court to seek bail in the cases.

Safu, general secretary of Jatiyatabadi Swachchhasebok Dal, was in the office last evening fearing arrest as some DB members were present in front of the office.

After hearing five bail

petitions, the HC bench of Justice Quamrul Islam Siddiqui and Justice AKM Zahirul Hoque granted bail to the 22 leaders and workers of BNP and its associated bodies.

The court's direction on Mirza Abbas means law enforcers cannot arrest him without filing any specific case, his counsel Zainul Abedin told The Daily Star.

ALAL'S WIFE COMPLAINS OF TORTURE

Syeda Nasima Ferdousi, wife of detained Jubo Dal leader Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal, yesterday alleged that her husband was being tortured in police remand.

"Alal is being tortured mentally and physically in the name of interrogation. He has been in custody for two days now, but he was not allowed to sleep for a second," Nasima told newsmen at her Lalmatia residence.

"Alal was addressing a rally which was recorded by camera crews from several TV channels. He was not involved in torching of vehicles or any other arson," she claimed and demanded immediate release of her husband.

Romney goes on offensive

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Romney went beyond expectations as the two candidates stood side-by-side for the first time after months of campaigning against each other from long distance.

Looking to claw his way back into a race that has seen Obama hold an edge among voters, Romney was on the offensive throughout the 90-minute encounter. While the president landed some punches on Romney's tax plan, he did not appear as prepared as his rival and missed several opportunities to attack.

With under five weeks to go until the November 6 election, it was uncertain whether Romney had managed to change the trajectory of a race that has favored Obama. It is difficult to dislodge an incumbent from the White House. In recent weeks, Romney has lurching from stumble to stumble and been unable to project a consistent message.

There was no question that Romney's campaign felt it was now in a better position. In the "spin room" afterward, Romney advisers hung around for 90 minutes talking to reporters, long after the Obama side had decamped.

A CNN/ORC snap poll said 67 percent of registered voters surveyed thought Romney won the debate at the University of Denver, compared with 25 percent

for Obama. Romney and Obama clashed repeatedly over taxes, healthcare and the role of government in ways that reflected the deep ideological divide in Washington and that has contributed to political gridlock.

Romney zeroed in on weak economic growth and 8.1 percent unemployment that have left Obama vulnerable in his effort to win a second four-year term. Government has taken on too big a role under Obama, dampening job creation, Romney argued.

"What we're seeing right now, in my view, [is] a trickle-down government approach, which has government thinking it can do a better job than free people pursuing their dreams. And it's not working. And the proof of that is 23 million people out of work," Romney said.

Fact checkers took issue with some of assertions by the former Massachusetts governor, like the number of people unemployed, but he appeared more poised and better prepared than his opponent.

Obama argued that under his leadership, the economy had been brought back from the brink, with 5 million jobs created in the private sector, a resurgent auto industry and housing beginning to rise.

"You know, four years ago, we were going through a major crisis. And yet my faith

and confidence in the American future is undiminished," Obama said.

NO MENTION OF THE '47 PERCENT'
Mysteriously, Obama failed to mention issues his campaign has used in attack ads to damage Romney such as the Republican's now infamous "47 percent" video, job cuts he made while at Bain Capital private equity firm, his tax returns and previous hard line on immigration.

The debate saw no hay-maker punches thrown and not much in the way of memorable one-line zingers. Instead, it was a war of attrition as each man used facts and figures to make his points and stress the differences between them.

Romney, however, did himself some favours with crisper answers than Obama, who sounded professorial and a bit long-winded despite his staff's best efforts to get him to give snappier comments.

Quite often Obama looked downward at his notes as Romney pounced on the president's record. At one point, the Democrat quibbled with debate moderator Jim Lehrer who tried to cut him off for going over his allotted time.

"I had five seconds before you interrupted me," Obama said to Lehrer with a smile.

Romney's chances of winning the White House were up by 8.4 percentage points after the debate,

Teachers without pay

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Teachers said they had not been getting salaries for a mind boggling period of 10 to 15 years.

They said during appointment, they were told that they would soon be enlisted in the government's monthly pay order (MPO), as their institutions were in the pipe line for or had been partially enjoying the MPO facilities.

The Awami League-led government, as per its electoral pledge, revived the MPO facility in 2010, six years after the annual scheme had been suspended by the then BNP-led alliance government.

That year, the government listed 1,624 private secondary and higher secondary schools and colleges for MPO following a lot of hassle among ruling party lawmakers.

In 2011, the education ministry prepared a list by including three institutions from each constituency for the next round but that too remained shelved due to fund crunch. In the meantime, the number of institutions awaiting MPO facility got bigger.

The situation hit such a point that the teachers have now taken to the streets.

Several thousand teachers and employees of the secondary schools, colleges, madrasas, and vocational schools and colleges, which are not listed for MPO, have been demonstrating at the Jatiya Press Club since October 1 under the banner "Non-MPO Shikkha Pratishthan Shikkhak Karmachari Oikyajote."

They said a few "lucky" teachers, whose institutions were doing comparatively better, received a nominal salary ranging between Tk 1,000 and 4,000. But the rest virtually work without pay.

Akida Sultana, management teacher of Pratap Technical and BM College in Ullapara of Sirajganj, said, "I have been going without any salary for the last 12 years. Just imagine how it feels!"

"I couldn't leave the institution because I couldn't abandon hope. But now I am frustrated and cornered by hardship," she told The Daily Star.

Shafiqul Islam, a lecturer of Newashi Alim Madrasa in Kurigram, joined the Alim (college level) section in 1998, seven years before the section got government approval.

"I was told that I would be given salary after my section got enlisted for MPO. But that moment never came," he said, adding that he was struggling much to fend for his family of five.

President of the teachers' platform Esharat Ali claimed that around 1.5 lakh teachers and employees of around 7,000 institutions were being deprived of the MPO facility, although according to the rules, obtaining academic approval from the government entitled an institution for MPO.

Education ministry officials said during the six years' suspension of MPO listing, a huge number of educational institutions got approval but many of those did not fulfil the criteria for government payroll.

Contacted Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid told The Daily Star that they were trying to devise a solution to this problem.

"We have to keep the financial crisis in mind. Besides, it is not possible to enlist all the institutions overnight. We have talked to the finance minister and hope to figure out a way soon," he added.

DRUG CHARGES Britons face death penalty in Indonesia

AFP, Denpasar

An Indonesian court yesterday indicted two Britons on multiple charges involving an alleged cocaine drug ring on the resort island of Bali, which could see them both face the death penalty.

Prosecutors told Bali's Denpasar district court that Lindsay June Sandiford in May smuggled 4.79 kilograms (10.6 pounds) of cocaine in the lining of her suitcase and that Julian Anthony Pounder had willingly received the drugs.

Sandiford was arrested in May upon arrival at the resort island's airport in Denpasar from Bangkok after customs officials found the drugs. Police then set up a sting and netted three more Britons and an Indian national.

"The defendant acted against Indonesian law in smuggling illegal drugs classified under category one into the country," prosecutor Lie Putra Setiawan told the Denpasar district court of Sandiford.

Indonesian law divides drugs into three categories, the first listing those considered most serious, including cocaine, heroin and methamphetamines.

"This offence carries a maximum penalty of death," Setiawan told reporters after the session.

Sandiford, who also faces charges of possession and selling narcotics, covered her face with a piece of cloth as she passed dozens of reporters to enter the courtroom.

Saudi beheaded for drug trafficking

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia beheaded one of its nationals yesterday for drug trafficking, the interior ministry announced.

Abdullah al-Wadie was arrested as he was "receiving and selling a large amount of hashish," said the statement carried by the official SPA news agency.

He was beheaded by the sword in the Aseer region in the southwest of the Gulf kingdom.

That brings to 62 the number of people executed in Saudi Arabia so far this year, according to an AFP tally based on official reports.

Amnesty International says 79 people were put to death last year.

Defence again fails

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It had told the defence to keep several witnesses on standby.

The defence yesterday produced only one witness whose testimony and cross-examination was over in less than an hour.

Yesterday, after the completion of the cross-examination of the witness, the tribunal asked the defence to produce the next witness.

But defence counsel Mizanul Islam informed the tribunal that their next witness could not come to Dhaka from Pirojpur.

"We have repeatedly told you [defence counsel], we will not allow this practice. We are not happy with the answer," the chairman of the three-member tribunal, Justice Md Nizamul Huq, said.

Mentioning that the tribunal had the authority to stop both defence and prosecution from producing witnesses, he said it was time for "an appropriate order".

But for the sake of justice, the tribunal would allow another day to the defence to produce witnesses, he said.

The defence produced their first witness on September 2. Over the last one month they produced seven witnesses.

The tribunal, on

September 20, expressed discontent over the prosecution and defence's repeated requests for adjournment of proceedings when they fail to produce witnesses.

The tribunal chairman had then said trial proceedings would not be adjourned if the defence or the prosecution failed to produce witnesses.

The proceedings of Sayedee's case were adjourned until Sunday.

Sayedee is facing several charges of crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War at the tribunal.

MATIA REPLIES CONTEMPT PETITION

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury submitted her reply to a contempt of court petition to the International Crimes Tribunal's registrar office yesterday afternoon, Matia's counsel Rezia Sultana Chaman told The Daily Star.

Earlier on the day, Tribunal-2 Chairman Justice ATM Fazle Kabir fixed October 7 for further orders on the petition when Rezia sought more time for submission of the petition.

War crimes accused Jamaat leader Kamaruzzaman filed the contempt petition against her on August 29.

INSULT TO ISLAM Egypt court frees Christian children

AFP, Cairo

An Egyptian court yesterday ordered the release of two Coptic Christian children accused of insulting Islam, a source in the prosecutor's office said.

He told AFP that prosecutor Abdel Meguid Mahmud took the decision because the accused, aged nine and 10, are minors, but the source did not specify if the charges were dropped.

Police arrested the children earlier this week after a complaint from Beni Sewif residents in southern Egypt for insulting Islam by allegedly urinating on a paper containing verses of the Koran, a judicial official said on Wednesday.

Nabil Naji Rizq, 10, and Mina Nadi Faraj, nine, were to have been held and questioned for a week at a juvenile facility.

A Coptic activist and lawyer said President Mohamed Morsi had intervened to have the two young Christians freed.

"I submitted a request to President Morsi which his Coptic aide, Samir Morcos, helped to deliver to him, and the president gave instructions for the prosecutor to release the two children," said Naguib Guebrail.

Putin turns 60 on Sunday

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin hits retirement age on Sunday but he appears determined to prove that 60 is the new 40.

In power since 1999 first as prime minister, then president, then prime minister and now president again, Putin has over the past decade sidelined opponents and in May triumphantly returned to the Kremlin for a historic third term.

As he turns 60, he may be going into the most important battle of his lifetime: the one against time itself.

Faced with the growing opposition movement against his rule, the Russian strongman has refused to step down and never ruled out running for another six-year Kremlin term in 2018.

In what critics say is a bid to prove he's a man in his prime, Putin has over the past few years staged a series of age-defying stunts.

Sri Lanka

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before 35,000 screaming fans at the Premadasa Stadium.

Herath, the 34-year-old left-arm spinner playing only his sixth T20 international, was supported by two wickets each from seamer Angelo Mathews and unorthodox spinner Ajantha Mendis.

It was Sri Lanka's second appearance in the World Twenty20 final, having lost to Pakistan in the 2009 title clash at Lord's.

It was also the first time in four editions of the tournament that began in 2007 that a host country had made it past the semifinal round.

Rival captains Mahela Jayawardene and Mohammad Hafeez top-scored for their teams with 42 each, but the other batsmen struggled to force the pace on a sluggish pitch that hampered stroke-making.

Sri Lanka wasted a sound start to plod to 123-4 in 19 overs, before Thisara Perera smashed three boundaries in the final over of seamer Umar Gul, which realised 16 runs.

Pakistan's openers Hafeez and Imran Nazir began the reply on a confident note, putting on 31 for the first wicket in six overs.

Mendis, brought on to send down the sixth over, broke the stand with the last delivery by bowling Nazir for 20.

Pakistan moved to 55-1 in the ninth over when Mathews grabbed two wickets in four balls to swing the match Sri Lanka's way.

Mathews first had Nasir Jamshed leg-before -- an unfortunate dismissal for the batsman since replays showed the ball pitch outside the leg-stump -- before getting Kamran Akmal caught at mid-wicket.

In the next over, Herath bowled new batsman Shoab Malik for six to leave Pakistan tottering at 64-4 in 11 overs.

Hafeez, dropped by Lasith Malinga on 24, added 18 more runs when he was stumped off Herath, who then bowled Shahid Afridi first ball.

Earlier, Sri Lankan openers Jayawardene and Tillakaratne Dilshan put on 63 in 10 overs, a slow start by Twenty20 standards but crucial nevertheless with their team having all their wickets in hand.

Jayawardene liberally employed the reverse sweep during his knock of 42 off 36 balls, but was caught at fine-leg while attempting the same shot off Afridi.

Kumar Sangakkara made a promising 18 from 11 balls when he was snapped up on the long-on fence as he tried to hit Hafeez out of the ground.

Gul was unlucky to see the TV umpire declare a no-ball after he had Jeevan Mendis given out leg-before in the 18th over.

But Gul removed Dilshan two balls later with another leg-before decision that made Sri Lanka 117-3.

Dilshan was unusually subdued during his innings, taking 43 balls to score 35 with the help of three boundaries.

Australia and the West Indies will clash in the second semifinal today. The final is scheduled for Sunday.

27 sued, finally

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disbursed over Tk 1,568.49 crore in loan to Hall-Mark between October 2011 and May this year.

"It is not a loan scam; it is the biggest ever misappropriation in the baking industry," he said, "Sonali Bank officials concerned helped Hall-Mark to embezzle the money by staying till late night in the branch."

The swindle was done through forged inland bill purchase (IBP), fraudulently showing some of the Hall-Mark officials as owners of various businesses, he said.

The ACC would now look into the wealth of Tanvir Mahmud, his wife and Hall-Mark Chairperson Jasmine Islam and the Sonali Bank directors who were in office when the scam happened, he added.

Asked why no member of the board of directors had been sued, he said the investigation did not find their link in the scam as the approval of the IBPs was not discussed in the board meetings.

On the arrest of the accused, he said: "We are making our highest effort to arrest them. We will also take steps so that they cannot flee the country."

Meanwhile, Tanvir Mahmud yesterday failed to submit the memorandum of articles and tax information of his companies to a parlia-

mentary sub-committee probing the loan scam.

Tanvir sent a letter to committee chief Tazul Islam, seeking another month for compliance to go into effect, officials in the parliament secretariat said.

FULL LIST OF ACCUSED
The Hall-Mark Group accused are its MD Tanvir Mahmud, Chairperson Jasmine Islam, General Manager Tusher Ahmed and officials Jahangir Alam, Mir Zakaria, Ziaur Rahman and Shahidul Islam.

Sonali Bank's Ruposhi Bangla branch officials: former manager AKM Azizur Rahman, assistant general manager Saiful Hasan and executive officer Md Abdul Matin. The trio has recently been suspended for their alleged involvement in the fraud.

The bank's Dhanmondi branch officials: Meherun Nesa Merry, senior executive officer, and Wahiduzzaman, former senior officer.

Head office officials: former MD Humayun Kabir, deputy managing director Mainul Haque (now officer on special duty), DMD Atikur Rahman (OSD), General Manager ANM Mashrurul Huda Siraji, GM Nani Gopal Nath (OSD), GM Meer Mahidur Rahman (OSD), former GM Sabita Siraj, Deputy General Manager Sheikh Altaf Hossain (suspended), DGM Bhagobati Majumder (sus-

pending), DGM Shafiqul Islam (suspended), DGM Kaniz Fatema Chowdhury, Assistant General Manager Kamrul Hossain Khan (suspended), AGM Ashraf Ali Patwari (suspended), AGM Abul Hassan and AGM Khurshid Alam.

FLASHBACK
In May, a Bangladesh Bank investigation revealed serious irregularities at Sonali Bank's Ruposhi Bangla branch in sanctioning and disbursing loans worth Tk 3,547 crore. Of the amount, Hall-Mark Group took Tk 2,686 crore against fake paper.

The BB then instructed the bank to take necessary action against 31 of its officials.

Later, Sonali Bank carried out a functional audit in the branch. The audit found that AKM Azizur Rahman and Saiful Hasan had extended unauthorised loans to Hall-Mark and five other companies. Hall-Mark alone was given Tk 2,667.45 crore.

The audit report said the branch manager demonstrated utter negligence to banking rules in sanctioning those loans.

On August 30, Sonali Bank suspended 17 of its officials over the fraud.