

Hartal

FROM PAGE 1
services from the city remained suspended during the shutdown.

In a sharp contrast to practices during hartals called by the BNP-led opposition in the past, the state-run Bangladesh Road Transportation Corporation (BRTC) buses were not seen on the city roads during hartal hours yesterday.

And law enforcement agencies, especially members of police, were seen diverting traffic from different points where pro-hartal activists took position and staged demonstrations.

Police were also blocked some roads to help hartal supporters to organise their programmes at Mirpur-10 intersection, and in Shahbagh and Paltan areas.

Talking to journalists at his secretariat office yesterday, Home Minister Muihuddin Khan Alamgir thanked CPB and BSD for observing a "peaceful" hartal across the country.

The minister, however, said he did not know anything about police barricades on city roads.

On the other hand, organisers of the hartal thanked people for making it a "success". The shutdown yesterday set an example of peaceful movement for realising demands without any violence, they said at two rallies at the city's Purana Paltan crossing.

Contacted, BRTC insiders said they were instructed by the authorities to refrain from plying the buses yesterday. Pro-government transport and labour leaders also asked their fellow workers not to bring any buses on roads, a transport sector leader said.

Md Khan Kamal Uddin, deputy general manager (operation) of BRTC, said workers loyal to the CBA did not ply buses in support of the hartal. "We did not put pressure on them to run buses," he added.

Meanwhile, the main opposition BNP termed the hartal "funny".

"We have observed how the home minister's forces observed hartal," Tariqul Islam, a BNP standing committee member, told journalists at the party central office at Nayapaltan.

CPB and BSD declared their next course of action including holding a rally on December 28 in front of the Jatiya Press Club with the same set of demands while GBM will hold a rally at the same venue on the same demands on Dec 24.

Earlier, 12 like-minded Islamist parties, mostly Jamaat-backed, had threatened to enforce a hartal on Thursday if the left-leaning parties did not withdraw their Tuesday's shutdown.

ACC now looks

FROM PAGE 1
consultancy job. The hearing of the case is expected to start in April next year, but it cannot be predicted when the trial would end.

ACC sources said Abul Hossain left no documentary evidence that could prove his role in dissolving the tender evaluation committee four times and reconstituting them to make sure that Canadian firm SNC Lavalin bags the \$50 million job to supervise the bridge's construction.

As a result, the ACC could not sue Abul for now, although the World Bank brought specific allegation against him. Abul's name was mentioned as a "suspect," not an accused, in the case the ACC filed against seven people on Monday.

The WB cancelled its \$1.2 billion funding on June 29 this year, saying it had proof of a "corruption conspiracy" involving Bangladeshi officials, executives of SNC Lavalin and some individuals.

The global lender revived the deal in September with an understanding that the government would take appropriate measures against all those involved in the conspiracy.

A competent ACC source told The Daily Star yesterday that the commission would collect a certified copy of the Canadian trial court's verdict, which is likely to be important hard evidence against Abul Hossain.

Attorney General Mahubey Alam told this correspondent that if the certified copies were collected through Mutual Legal Assistance Rules or embassy, they would surely be accepted as evidence in Bangladesh courts.

"We collected the official letters about dissolving and reconstituting the evaluation committee for selecting a supervision consultant but these letters were not signed by Abul Hossain," the ACC source said.

Also, the commission did not find any official documents to establish that Abul Hossain held meetings with SNC Lavalin officials, although such meetings indeed took place.

Official documents show former Bridges Division secretary Mosharraf Hossain convened those meetings.

Ramesh's diary seized by the Canadian police also mentioned the names of Abul Hossain, former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, Mosharraf and others who were to be bribed.

During its year-long inquiry, the ACC came to know through interviewing

over three dozen people that Abul Hossain gave verbal instructions to his officials, leaving no hard evidence. The ex-minister did not have any email communications with Lavalin either, according to the ACC source.

In its case, the ACC stated that Syed Abul Hossain along with Mosharraf met Lavalin officials several times. Following these meetings, the bridge authority on June 19 last year sent recommendation for work order in favour of SNC Lavalin.

According to officials of Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division that deals with procurement rules, the rules empower the secretary to dissolve or form evaluation committees. But in case of large projects, the secretary must consult the minister concerned to do so.

Contacted, former cabinet secretary Akbar Ali Khan said, "In the past, the secretary did not have the power to dissolve or form any tender evaluation committee. All powers were vested in the minister."

Former communications secretary Ali Kabir, who has recently retired after working under Abul Hossain, said: "In any big project, secretaries usually consult the ministers before forming such committees."

INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE

Meanwhile, the ACC yesterday formed a four-member committee to investigate the case filed with Banani Police Station. The team was asked to submit a report at the earliest.

ACC Deputy Director Abdullah Al Zahid will lead the team comprised of three other deputy directors -- Mir Mohammad Zainul Abedin Shebly, Golam Shahrir Chowdhury and Mirza Zahidul Alam.

ACC Director Moniruzzaman will monitor the investigation.

The seven accused in the case are former secretary of the Bridges Division Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Superintendent Engineer of Bangladesh Bridge Authority (BBA) Kazi Mohammad Ferdous, Executive Engineer of Roads and Highway Department Reaz Ahmed Zaber, Deputy Managing Director of Engineering and Planning Consultant, a local agent Canadian firm SNC Lavalin, Mohammad Mostofa and SNC Lavalin officials Mohammad Ismail, Ramesh Shah and Kevin Wales.

Alleged involvement of Abul Hossain and Abul Hasan in the graft would be examined during the investigation.

ADB unveils \$525m aid plan for Cambodia

AFP, Phnom Penh

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) yesterday announced a \$525 million aid plan for Cambodia over the next three years to promote the country's economic growth.

The ADB said the money would be used to fund projects to promote rice production and exports, improve transport links and irrigation systems, and develop towns along economic "corridors" connecting Southeast Asia.

The plan aims to boost Cambodia's economy and make it "more resilient to external shocks," said ADB economist Peter Brimble.

Cambodia's economy is expected to grow by 6.4 percent this year, according to the Manila-based ADB.

Written off as a failed state after the devastating 1975-79 Khmer Rouge regime and several decades of civil war, the Southeast Asian nation has used garment exports and tourism to help improve its economy.

Iran mine collapse kills four workers

AFP, Tehran

A coal mine collapsed in central Iran yesterday, leaving four miners dead and another four missing, Iranian media reported, quoting officials.

The probable cause was an "explosion of accumulated dangerous gas" in the mine near the city of Tabas, its governor Ahmad Talebian Moqadam told Fars news agency.

Officials said the collapse occurred at about 9:00 am (0530 GMT) and that it had blocked the main entrance to the tunnel of the mine, which employed 40 workers.

Tabas is located 555 kilometres (345 miles) southeast of Tehran.

Negligence

FROM PAGE 1
spread, but it should take only about five to seven minutes for about 1,000 workers to get out the factory, it added.

"As the collapsible gates were locked and there was no emergency exit, hundreds of workers were suffocated and burnt to death as they did not find any other way to escape."

The four-member probe body held Delowar Hossain and eight others responsible for the "unforgivable negligence" and recommended bringing them to book.

The eight are Abdur Razzak, factory manager, Shahiduzzaman Dulal, quality manager, Mobarak Hossain Monju, production manager, Sohel Rana, assistant production manager, Harun ur Rashid, assistant general manager and Al-Amin, security in-charge, of Tazreen Fashions, and M Mahbul Morshed, engineer of Apotrophe Engineers in Mohakhali.

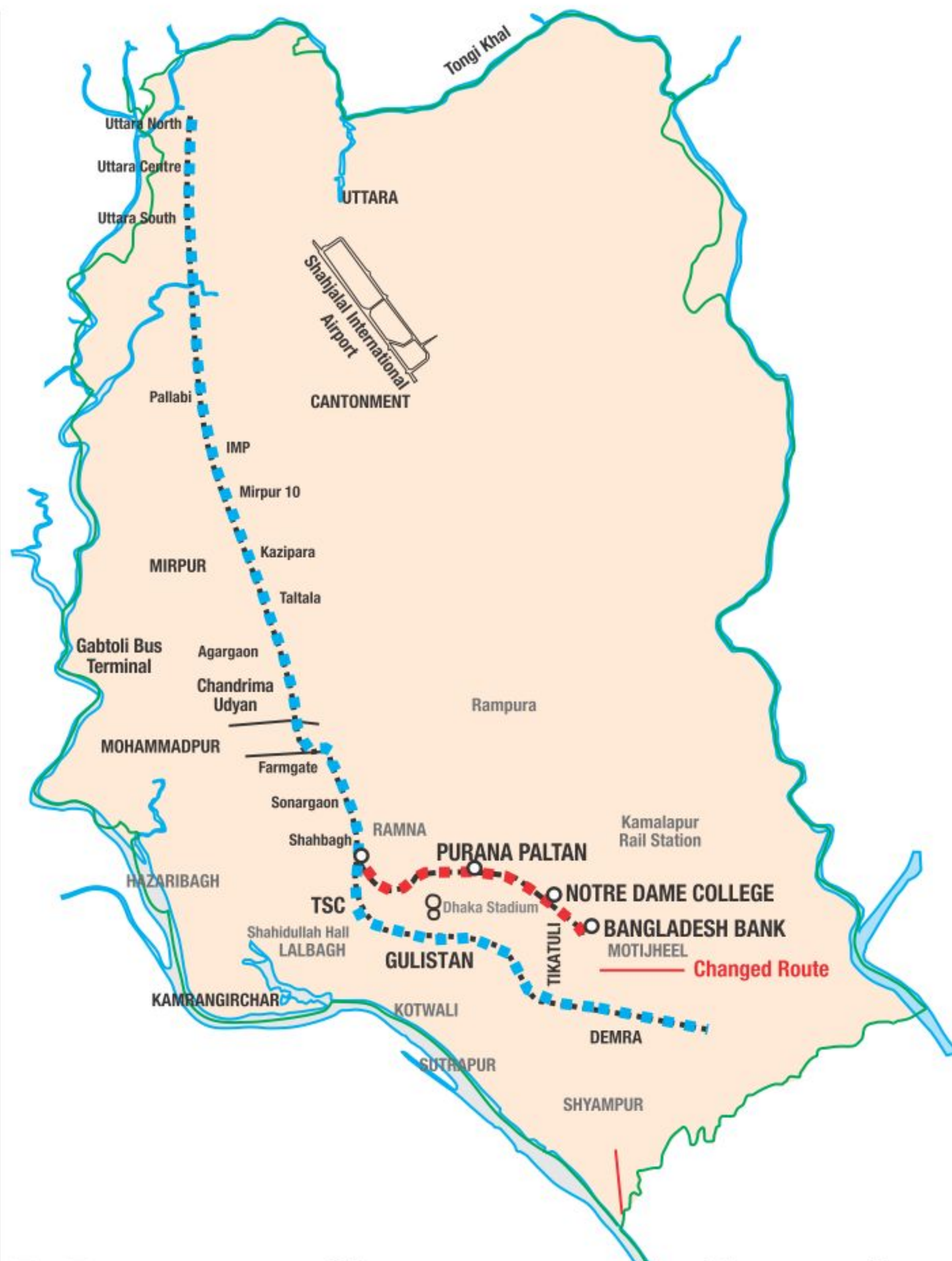
Quoting Lily, a sewing machine operator, who also gave witness to the probe committee, the report said: "At about 7:00pm [on November 24] when she was going down from the third floor through the northeast stairs she saw that at the middle of the ground floor four people were trying to douse the fire using their hands."

"It appears that the spread of the fire was within a small area initially."

"She [Lily] also saw that the fire spread throughout the room after security supervisor Al-Amin poured one bucket of something on the fire. She saw director Shahjahan, factory manager Razzak, security in-charge Al-Amin and an unknown worker from the cutting section."

Lily forced her way out of the factory although Director Shahjahan tried to stop her from going out, said the report.

The probe report said the local fire office was informed after the fire 30 minutes after the fire broke out.



Metro rail gets go-ahead

FROM PAGE 1

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair.

Japan will bear 76 percent (Tk 16,595 crore) cost of the project while the remaining 24 percent would come from government funds. Japan has already approved \$133 million for the project in the current fiscal year.

The project aims to reduce traffic jam through the installation of an elevated metro rail system, which will be the first of its kind in the capital, said the ministry statement.

The project seeks to promote a massive socio-economic development through the modernisation of public transport system, it said.

The project gained momentum recently after a nearly three-year delay over the change of route of the metro rail. The delay increased the project cost to \$2.7 billion from \$1.7 billion.

Several international companies have been short-listed for preparing detailed design and supervising the construction. They have been asked to submit technical and financial proposals to the government. The companies now await approval of Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica).

The metro rail project, the country's second largest infrastructure project after the \$2.9 billion Padma bridge project, became uncertain last year when the proposed rail route was modified for the second time following objections from the air force. The route running across Bijoy Sarani was diverted towards Khamarbari, which irked Jica.

A change in the route was first made in 2010 to avoid overlapping with the under-construction Gulistan-Jatrabari flyover.

Jica, however, did not desert the project and waited for the government to finalise the route, find a place for a depot and set up a company that will eventually operate the metro rail.

Earlier, Jica had conducted a study on metro rail. The study said the metro rail will operate every three minutes and carry 60,000 passengers an hour.

The Ecnc also approved another project for Tk 1,230 crore to build climate resilient infrastructures in 12 coastal districts of the country's south-western region, said the planning ministry statement.

The project, which involves development of rural road network and market facility enhancement, will help lift the living standard of rural people.

The Ecnc approved a total of eight projects involving Tk 26,271 crore, said the statement.

Investigator claims

FROM PAGE 20

The tribunal indicted Azad with eight charges of crimes against humanity on November 4 and has been holding his trial in absentia as he is on the run. Apart from Noor, 21 prosecution witnesses including a seizure list witness testified in the case.

During his two-hour testimony, Noor, a police inspector, said as part of investigation he had visited the crime spots in Faridpur, interrogated the persons concerned and recorded their statements.

He had even visited India to record statements of some victims, said Noor, adding that he had recorded statements of 55 people as witnesses in the case.

The witnesses' statements and evidence show Azad being an active accomplice of Pakistani army was directly involved in killings, genocide and other crimes in Faridpur and its neighbouring areas, he added.

First Azad was a volunteer Razakar. Then he became a Razakar and afterwards he became the Al-Badr commander of Faridpur, Noor added.

He said Azad was a first year student at Faridpur Rajendra College in 1970, adding that he had learned that Azad as a member of Jamaat-e-Islami along with Chhatra Sangha leader Mojaheed held several processions and meetings in Faridpur and neighbouring areas in support of the then Pakistani government.

During his investigation, Noor tried to get information and documents from the deputy commissioner of Faridpur about the "incidents" done by the Pakistani army and their local collaborators Razakar, Al-Badr and

Al-Shams and the persons involved in the incidents.

"He [the DC] said all the information and documents from 1971 to August 15, 1975 were destroyed in a planned way after August 15, 1975," added Noor.

He said during investigation he, however, seized some documents, which were sent to the deputy commissioner of Faridpur to the investigation agency in 2010.

Noor Hossain told The Daily Star Faridpur district administration prepared the report after field level investigation in different parts of the district.

As per the documents, Noor told the tribunal at least 94 people were killed in Boalmari upazila and another 103 in Nagarkanda upazila during the war.

"There was a list of Razakar and Al-Badr members of Faridpur in the report and on the list, Azad alias Bachchu's name was put on top as the chief of Faridpur district Al-Badr," said Noor.

A list of the district committees of the then Faridpur Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Sangha was incorporated with the documents, said Noor, adding that names of Azad and Mojaheed were mentioned on the list.

Noor said as he had found evidence of crimes against humanity committed by Azad, he, through the chief prosecutor, sought arrest warrant against Azad. But the accused fled immediately before the tribunal issued an arrest warrant against him.

QUADER MOLLAH'S CASE
Meanwhile, the prosecution yesterday continued placing arguments in the war crimes case against Jamaat leader Abdul Quader Mollah for the

second day.

Mohammad Ali, the conducting prosecutor of the case, placed his argument on the charge number one citing testimony of the second prosecution witness Syed Shahidul Haque Mama.

On May 28, the tribunal indicted the Jamaat assistant secretary general for six specific charges of crimes against humanity allegedly committed during the war.

According to the first charge, Quader Mollah and his cohorts killed Bangla College student Pallab in 1971.

Ali cited a part of Shahidul's testimony where he had described the morning of March 26 in 1971. Shahidul had seen houses of Bangladeshes in Mirpur burning and Biharis celebrating. When Shahidul and his friend Mantu went closer, Quader Mollah and his accomplices tried to catch them.

But they escaped by swimming across the Turag river and took shelter in Bargaon village, Ali quoted Shahidul as saying.

Shahidul's testimony proved that Quader Mollah was in Dhaka during the Liberation War, Ali added.

Quader Mollah, as the first defence witness in his case, claimed he had left Dhaka on March 11 or 12 in 1971 for his village and three other defence witnesses also testified that the Jamaat leader spent the rest of 1971 and almost entire 1972 in Faridpur.

The tribunal recorded the prosecution's argument for an hour as senior defence counsels were not present yesterday "due to hartal".

The argument is set to resume today.

Fog, cold disrupt public life

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People across the country experienced bitter cold due to a slump in temperature since yesterday morning.

The freezing weather coupled with thick fog and cloudy sky increased the sufferings of poor people living under the open sky.

An official of the Met Office said a sharp contrast between day and night temperatures increased the severity of cold, though a cold spell has not yet begun to sweep across the country.

The present situation will continue for the next two or three days, he added.

In Dhaka, the highest temperature was recorded at 19.3 degrees Celsius while the lowest temperature was 15 degrees Celsius yesterday.

The lowest temperature in the country was recorded at 11.6 degrees Celsius in Ishwardi.

The Met official also said people in the capital will experience the first spell of cold wave in the last week of December while the rest of the country will feel it in the first week of January.

In Lalmonirhat, cold snap has claimed lives of two elderly men and a child in the last three days.

Mohibur Rahman, 66, of Char Shoalmari village in Kaliganj upazila died on Saturday, Asma Bawa, 62, of Polashi village of Aditatri upazila on Sunday, and Mihaz, 4, of Lalmonirhat Sadar on Monday, reports our

Lalmonirhat correspondent quoting hospital and family sources.

Criminals

FROM PAGE 20

associates of the city's notorious criminals, panicked the managers, nine in the capital and one in Tongi.

A senior bank official told The Daily Star, "We are very disturbed by the calls from the self-proclaimed criminals. It is affecting our work for closing the transactions of the year."

The official said the Tongi branch manager was threatened by "Prakash and Mollah Masud and his leader Hathkata Shahadat" at 12:55pm on the fixed phone of the branch.

"The callers told the manager to give them money, which they would use to have their gang leader released from jail through the High Court."

"They said, 'If you do not provide the money, your family members will be kidnapped and our team will attack you very soon. Our team knows you but you don't know them. So agree with us and our team will meet you accordingly,'" the official quoted the callers as saying.

A branch manager of the bank in Dhaka said he received a call from a criminal claiming to be an associate of the "now deceased criminal gang leader Dakat Shahid".

"He demanded money from my personal source. When I refused, he threatened me with life," said the official.

In one call, the caller demanded Tk 2 lakh.

In most branches, the callers identified themselves as Zishan and Hathkata Manik and used mobile phone numbers 01850355174, 01845171547, 01191893948 and 01687709973 to make the calls.

Officials said they reported the incidents to Rapid Action Battalion and the police stations concerned. A general diary was also filed with Tongi Police Station.

A bank official said some people were trying to collect the personal mobile phone numbers of managers of different branches of the bank, claiming themselves personal secretary to the secretary of the information ministry.

Sabotage, really?

FROM PAGE 1

Sultana Kamal, executive director of rights body Ain o Shalish Kendra (ASK), questioned the report as it completely failed to dig out who did the "sabotage", how and why.

"If it was sabotage, the owner should be sympathised, not blamed."

She said the probe report as well as the first information report (FIR) by police echoes the views of government high-ups who came up with a sabotage theory soon after the incident.

Sultana, a former caretaker government adviser, demands an independent body to investigate the Tazreen tragedy.

After submitting the report on Monday, Main Uddin Khandaker explained why his team thought it was an act of sabotage. "There was no possibility of fire originating from an electric short-circuit, as there was no electric wire close to the place. It came from outside."

But Kalpana Akhter, executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Workers Solidarity, yesterday told The Daily Star that she had seen a substation and a generator only three feet off the warehouse on the ground floor.

"I'm not surprised to see the word sabotage [in the report] as it was what the government ministers said a day after the incident," said the worker leader.

Terming the report biased, Mushrefa Mishu, president of

Garment Workers Unity Forum, criticised the government for not taking actions against the owner of Tazreen Fashions yet.

"The government probe report held the owner responsible for gross violations of compliance rules, but he is yet to be arrested."

Both Kalpana Akhter and Mushrefa Mishu said the report was full of contradictions, a claim Main Uddin Khandaker denies.

"The report has explained why it was sabotage and at the same time blamed the owner for his gross violations of rules," he said.

The main gate, the only entry and exit point of the factory was found locked just after the fire started, exposing the fleeing workers to smoke and suffocation.

Who closed down the gate and why, questioned the additional secretary, reasoning out his sabotage theory.

Md Nur Khan, director, investigation and documentation unit of ASK, said, "The government should have sealed the factory soon after the incident and arrested the owner, but it was not done even after nearly one month."

The High Court in 1997, following ASK's writ petition over a Mirpur garment factory fire, ordered the government to form a national committee to ensure safety in factories. But no such committee has yet been formed.

Nur Khan said successive