

Nababarsha rally today at Shahbagh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Gonojagoron Mancha is all set to greet Bangla year of 1420 today with a pledge to continue the movement, albeit in a new and strengthened form, to rid the country of war criminals.

As part of Baishakhi celebration, it will hold day-long programmes, including a Nababarsha grand rally at 4:00pm in the capital's Shahbagh, announced Imran H Sarker, the spokesperson for Gonojagoron Mancha, at a press conference yesterday.

The movement has been on for over two months, calling for the capital punishment to all war criminals and a ban on Jamaat-Shibir for their role against the independence of Bangladesh in 1971.

Imran yesterday urged people all over the country to participate in solidarity human chain from wherever they are for three minutes from 5:00pm today.

The protesters will also light 'mangal pradeep' (auspicious lamps) at 7:30pm as a symbol of eliminating darkness.

"This movement will gain momentum and spread everywhere [in the new year]," Imran said while taking an oath "in the name of Fatikhchhari martyrs" who had been killed during hartal violence on Friday.

Cops raid

FROM PAGE 1
Press, said Shah Alam, officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station.

Police also picked up 19 of the Amar Desh press staff from the Sangram Office.

Magistrate Nasrin Sultana filed a case with Ramna Police Station last night against the Amar Desh authorities for printing the daily at Al-Falah press without permission.

Mahmudur Rahman, acting editor of Bangla daily Amar Desh, was arrested on Thursday and placed on a 13-day remand in three cases.

Later that day, police locked the Amar Desh press and seized a computer and some documents.

In the case he was arrested, Mahmudur faces sedition charge for publishing Skype conversations between Justice Md Nizamul Huq, former chairman of International Crimes Tribunal-1, and Ahmed Ziauddin, an expatriate Bangladeshi legal expert.

He was shown arrested in two other cases, filed last month with Tejgaon Police Station for acts of violence and assaulting police during hartals.

Polls

FROM PAGE 20
equal number of members from both the ruling and the opposition alliances, to form the polls-time government for holding a free and fair election.

Mosharraf made the comment while addressing as the chief guest a human chain of Keraniganj BNP in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday, demanding unconditional release of party leaders, who were held on March 11.

"Over the last three years, we have repeatedly been telling [the government] the same thing [as the TIB said about a polls-time government]," he mentioned.

He welcomed the TIB proposal but expressed concern over its success as the government is "not sincere about the demand of the opposition".

"The proposal will achieve the intended result if the government is sincere and the opposition consents to it."

Mosharraf said every political crisis calls for dialogues but the present situation is not favourable for them as the government arrested opposition men in "false cases".

He asked the government to withdraw the cases and ease the situation for talks with the opposition alliance.

How the government responds to the TIB proposal will determine the BNP's next course of action, said Mosharraf.

Get rid of impasse

FROM PAGE 1
towards holding of a free and fair election with participation of major political parties.

"If we can achieve progress on these three fronts, we will be able to come of the current volatile situation which is crippling the economy," said the noted economist.

He was speaking at a dialogue styled "Bangladesh 2013: Assessing Economic Implications of the Present Political Shocks" at Hotel Lakeshore in Dhaka.

The CPD came up with the call to get the country out of the current political crisis, and to support the growth prospects of the economy.

Yesterday's dialogue came at a time when the present government, now in its final year of the five-year tenure, faces a tough period as the opposition parties are calling for hartals demanding restoration of caretaker government system and to stop the trials of the war criminals.

Most speakers at the dialogue said that they did not think that the economy could be protected if the current political situation continued.

Rehman Sobhan, chairman of CPD, who chaired the dialogue, said the shutdowns in Bangladesh were being called for at a time when Bangladesh had economic opportunities in the global front.

He said, "These are historic opportunities. But we may miss out on this moment once the industries reposition themselves."

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"BNP is saying that it will only take part in the election that is held under a caretaker government system. But it will never be possible as there is no such provision for it in the constitution. The Awami League will never make any compromise on the caretaker government issue."

Tofail claimed that if there were no trials of war criminals, the current situation would not have arisen. "But the trial is one of our election promises. It is not possible to stop it," he said.

Former education minister Osman Faruque said there was time to hold dialogues. "Definitely, the opposition parties have their responsibilities, but it is the government who will

have to come forward first," he said.

"We need to have a meaningful dialogue at the top level to save the country, not like the ones in the past, when two secretary generals of the two parties met over tea and there was no breakthrough," he said, recalling the 2006 dialogue between Awami League and BNP.

Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury, former commerce minister, said, "The caretaker government system was a political consensus. It was a doctrine of necessity. The court or the parliament cannot be used for saying that the system cannot be restored."

"You [the government] have created the mess and you will have to clean it," he said, in reply to suggestions that the opposition was not cooperating with the government.

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said the country was not being run in line with the constitution. It is being overlooked in a planned manner.

MM Akash, professor of economics at Dhaka University, said Bangladesh would not be able to exploit its economic potentials at the global level if the country did not have proper leadership.

Anis Ud Dowlah, former president of Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said there was no alternative to dialogue between the two major parties.

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Testimony

FROM PAGE 20
had gone to the procession on his friends' request. "If we had known about it, we would not have let him go," he said.

Ferdous Begum is numbed by the shock of losing her son Forkan. All she has been saying since Thursday is, "Oh, my son! Where are you? Please come back to me."

Eyewitnesses and local administration sources said the three were killed when activists of Hefajat-e Islam and Jamaat-e-Islami, joined in by locals gathered through announcement over loudspeakers, attacked an anti-hartal AL procession with sharp weapons and sticks.

The attack was made around 11:30am as the procession was marching through Kazirhat in Bhujpur.

More than 100 people, including 15 policemen, four firefighters, and two BGB men, were injured. Around 100 vehicles including motorcycles, jeeps, pick-ups, a police van and a fire truck were torched during the mayhem. Some 20 shops were also set ablaze.

Meanwhile, the government yesterday closed the officer-in-charge of Bhujpur Police Station.

Ang Sung Twain, inspector of the station, had been given the charge, said Superintendent of Police in Chittagong AKM Hafiz Akhter, adding that they were investigating whether the former OC had neglected his duties during the attack.

As of yesterday, police have arrested 40 suspects.

Additional SP of Chittagong Farid Uddin said law enforcers were looking into the matter and would release the innocent ones after verification. He asked Bhujpur villagers not to be afraid.

On Friday, police filed a case against around 5,000 people, including 100 named, for attacking law enforcers and obstructing their work.

A rickshaw-puller, who witnessed the violence on Thursday, said just when the AL marchers were returning, he had heard an announcement from Kazirhat mosque that Moulana Junaid bin Jalal, principal of Al Jamiatul Islamia Bhujpur Madrasa, was killed in AL assault and the mosque and the madrasa were under attack.

Contacted yesterday, Moulana Junaid told The Daily Star that when he heard the rumour, he rushed to the mosque and announced in the loudspeaker that he was alright and no one had attacked him. But the situation had gone out of hand by then, he added.

Abdul Alim, chairman of Jafarnagar union parishad, was present during the mayhem. He said he had heard the attackers chanting slogans "Allahr Ain Chai, Sot Loker Shason Chai" [We want the laws of Allah, rule of the honest].

Police suspect the attack was planned and inflammatory substances had been used while torching vehicles and shops.

The Chittagong SP said they had found that local Jamaat-Shibir men had instigated the locals to swoop on AL men by spreading a rumour.

Meanwhile, Hefajat-e Islam has denied its involvement in the violence.

Qawmi Madrasa

FROM PAGE 20
accepting their proposals, which include establishing a Qawmi University.

She instructed Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid and Education Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, who were present on the occasion, to take necessary steps in this regard, he added.

Sheikh Hasina also called upon all the Islamic scholars to raise their voice against the countrywide mayhem of Jamaat-Shibir and a section of misguided Islamist parties.

According to Gono Bhaban sources, no journalists were invited to the event.

The teachers of Qawmi madrasas, remnants of ages-old Islamic education system, have long been demanding government recognitions and certificates under a single Qawmi education board.

Recently, the education minister said the government wants to upgrade madrasa education so that students who pass from those institutions can also contribute to different fields of national development.

Unrest to hurt GDP

FROM PAGE 1
caused by shutdowns can be recouped to some extent, but those to the service sector, unfortunately, cannot," Hussain said, while highlighting the damages to the transport sector, termed the lifeline of the economy.

The WB in the report credited the weak exports and investments resulting from the impact of the Eurozone crisis, domestic supply constraints and intensified strikes and unrests, for the lower growth forecast.

A further deterioration of the political situation and weakening of the financial condition of state-owned commercial banks (SoCBs) pose the greatest risk for growth prospect and public finances, it added.

"While increasing violence and political rivalry is not uncommon in Bangladesh as elections near, the recent protests, mainly by youth demanding capital punishment for persons under trial for war crimes, has added a new dimension to pre-election

dynamics."

"The resistance from the opposition has resulted in intermittent violence together with increased frequency of hartals. Hartals create an unfriendly and unstable environment for investment by disrupting production and trading activities and increasing the cost of doing business."

Meanwhile, the solvency of the SoCBs worsened considerably during 2012, with weak internal controls, poor corporate governance and slackening of credit standards, to blame.

The SoCBs classified more than Tk 40 billion as non-performing loans (NPL), thereby raising their NPLs to 17.7 percent by September 30, 2012, up from 12.1 percent in March, 2012, according to the report.

The series of loan scams in 2012 has left SoCBs in severe liquidity crisis, so much that they frequently fail to maintain the cash reserve requirement of Bangladesh Bank (BB).

Most of the state-owned banks, according to BB, are

now meeting their daily expenses by borrowing from the call money market and from the liquidity support facility of the BB in the form of the special repurchase agreement.

"As a result of this liquidity crunch, the SCBs have virtually stopped sanctioning new loans."

Should either of the two identified big risks materialize, policy adjustments will be necessary, primarily through exchange rates and fiscal channels, said the WB.

"Stronger economic governance will be needed along with fiscal and financial controls to maintain public debt sustainability."

The WB also said the recovery in the US and the Eurozone will be critical for the country's economic growth, due to these regions serving as predominant export destinations for Bangladeshi products.

The possible backlash from the recent compliance and labour safety issues at garment factories have also been detected as a risk factor by the WB.

PM rejects all new formulas

FROM PAGE 1
made the remarks at a view-exchange with her party's grassroots-level leaders of Pabna district at her official residence Gono Bhaban.

She said, "All people, irrespective of race and religion, will enjoy their rights in the country. But rest assured that the government will not tolerate any sort of defamation of any religion, especially of our great Prophet [pbuh]. We will definitely take punitive actions against the culprits."

Some people had used a picture of the Gilaf of holy Makkah for their own gains, she said, adding, "This is one kind of *shirk*, and it will not be tolerated."

The premier said many people recently came up with new formulas for the next general election. "The High Court gave its verdict against the caretaker government system; it's (CG) gone ... we amended the constitution to strengthen democracy."

"The election will be held as per the system followed by other democratic countries in the world," she said, adding, "Look at Britain, the US and Malaysia ... we will have to consider their examples and follow those."

In its Friday's statement, TIB proposed the formation of a Parliamentary Consensus Committee involving lawmakers from both Awami League-led grand alliance and BNP-led 18-party alliance to select the members of polls-time government.

According to the proposal, the Speaker will ask the polit-

ical parties to submit the names of their nominees for the committee to him. The committee may be formed taking equal number of members from both the alliances.

The parliamentary consensus committee will select the chief of the government in consultation with the ruling and opposition alliances. The committee will also select the persons for a 10-member cabinet of the proposed government.

The members of the polls-time government will be selected 30 days before the expiry of the present government's tenure, so that the president can hand over power to the interim government after dissolving the parliament.

Referring to elections to various offices held under the present government in the last four years, she said those polls had been free, fair and neutral. Awami League had a long history of struggle to establish the voting rights of people.

"No matter what, AL never wants to come to power by rigging," she asserted.

Hasina asked Opposition Leader Khaleda Zia to gain people's confidence and trust, as the people of the country had lost their trust in her due to her party's destructive politics.

She mentioned that her government has so far exercised restraint, but this should not be interpreted as weakness. "Stop killing and arson, as your (Khaleda's) desire will not be fulfilled through these."

The premier observed

that everything had its limits. The government would not sit idle if the opposition crossed the limit of tolerance. "You will kill people, set fire to property and the government will sit idle ... that will never happen."

Hasina urged people to come forward and resist the opposition's destructive activities, including its efforts to save war criminals. "Nobody has given her any clean chit to kill people and destroy national property in the name of agitation and trying to save war criminals."

The Awami League chief alleged that when the government had started the trial of war criminals, the opposition party unleashed destructive activities across the country to save the war criminals.

"The opposition chief has been pursuing the policy of Yahya Khan, who wanted the land, not its people, in 1971," she alleged.

The prime minister said those who had committed crimes in the country must face trial on Bangladesh's soil.

Deputy Leader of the House Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Planning Minister AK Khandaker, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, AL presidium member Mohammad Nasim, AL Joint Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, Abul Hasnat Abdullah, State Minister for Home Affairs Shamsul Huq Tuku and State Minister for LGED Jahangir Kabir Nanak were also present in the meeting.

Woes on highways

FROM PAGE 20
Transport operators attributed the huge traffic jams to the last week's back-to-back countrywide hartals (Monday thru Thursday) and the rush of outbound passengers in the capital to celebrate Pahela Baishakh.

The gridlock on Dhaka-Chittagong highway occurred at Daudkandi Toll Plaza on Friday night and extended up to Comilla Cantonment area yesterday morning.

Some HSC examinees faced problems to reach their examination centres at Gouripur and Hasnapur of Daudkandi upazila in Comilla, reports our Daudkandi correspondent.

KM Rezaul Haque, principal of Gouripur Govt College, said some examinees were late by few minutes for the examinations.

Two youths riding a motorbike hurled the cocktails at the house in Gulshan-2 around 4:00pm and sped away, said police and local people.

"We are yet to find out who threw the cocktails and why," the DC said.

Contacted, Hanif, joint secretary of the ruling party, said cadres of the BNP and its ally Jamaat-e-Islami had made the bomb attack to kill him as well as to destabilise the country.

Businessman Abul Kalam, 50, took a bus from Dhaka for Laxmipur around 6:15am. The bus reached Daudkandi around 7:00am and got stuck in the jam.

Around 3:15pm, it reached Kutumbapur of Chandina upazila. Kalam was without food for nine hours.

Many drivers added to the sufferings of passengers as they tried to overtake violating traffic rules, only to get stuck again, mentioned Daudkandi Highway Police officials.

Traffic on the highway returned to normal around 4:30pm.

On the Dhaka-Tangail highway, the tailback occurred due to a road accident on Friday.

Highway police said a bus hit a truck at Sutrapur in Kaliakoir around 11:30pm,

causing the accident.

As a result, the road was blocked for an hour and the gridlock occurred.

Hundreds of vehicles got stuck in Chandra intersection and Mouchak Telichala areas of Kaliakoir upazila in Gazipur.

Later, a police wrecker pulled the vehicles out of the road.

Worsening the traffic, another truck was out of order on the highway at Konabari of Gazipur Sadar upazila.

Traffic became normal around 3:00pm.

On the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway, the gridlock occurred as rush of vehicles piled up on the road. Passengers suffered a lot without enough drinking water and food.

The traffic jam continued on the road till 7:30pm.

India rules

FROM PAGE 20
function in Khulna, crude bombs went off approximately 20 metres away from where his car was parked."

Asked if the bomb attack was a matter of concern for the security of Indians, especially officials and diplomats in Bangladesh, he said, "Nobody involved with the High Commission was injured, nor was the car was damaged. I may also clarify that it was not the High Commission's vehicle. Rather, it was a local car hired by the High Commission."

"Since the explosions, the Indian envoy has received a large number of calls expressing concern at the attack. The callers assured him of providing enough security to him and all the officials of the mission. So, we have no cause for concern there," added the spokesperson.

The Indian High Commission, he noted, is in touch with Bangladeshi authorities who are investigating the incident. "Let us wait for the outcome of the investigation before jumping to any conclusion whether this was an attack related to the High Commission at all."

Mayans

FROM PAGE 20
temple, originally radio-carbon-tested in 1960, scientists believe it shows the Maya culture did collapse a thousand years ago because it failed to cope with climate change - a proposition first suggested last year.

The Central American people had developed a sophisticated society, accurate calendars and complex architecture including pyramids.

They thrived during rainy periods but a prolonged drought somewhere between AD 800 and 1100 is said to have brought about its collapse.

For a long time, experts struggled to match dates from the Mayan Long Count calendar with the modern European calendar.

The Long Count system comprised 20-day cycles made up of k'in, which formed 360-day cycles known as tuns.

Another unit, b'ak'tun, represented a cycle of 400 years - and it was the ending of one of these that led to the belief of the apocalypse in 2012.

Now, archaeologist Douglas Kennett, from Pennsylvania State University, has applied modern carbon dating methods to a lintel, carved with historical records, found at Tikal, which was a major Mayan city, according to NBC News.

His aim was to confirm the accuracy of the dating: 50 years ago, other researchers at the university reckoned the beam had been carved between AD 695 and 712.

"When looking at how climate affects the rise and fall of the Maya, I began to question how accurately the two calendars correlated using those methods," Kennett said.

As well as using carbon isotopes to establish its age, he and his team looked at the tree rings in the wood.

The date they concluded was around AD 658-696, which backed up the original correlation estimates.

The two estimates match up even more closely after factoring in the removal of ten to 15 years of wood growth while the carving took place, the researchers said in the journal Scientific Reports.

The lintel they analysed concerned the defeat of Tick'aak K'ahk', king of the nearby city of Calakmul, by Tikal's leader Jasaw Chan K'awil.

This is turned reconfirmed the theory that the victory was in AD 695, 13 years after Jasaw Chan K'awil took to the throne.

Their report in the journal continued: "These events and those recorded at cities throughout the Maya lowlands can now be harmonized with greater assurance to other environmental, climatic and archaeological datasets."