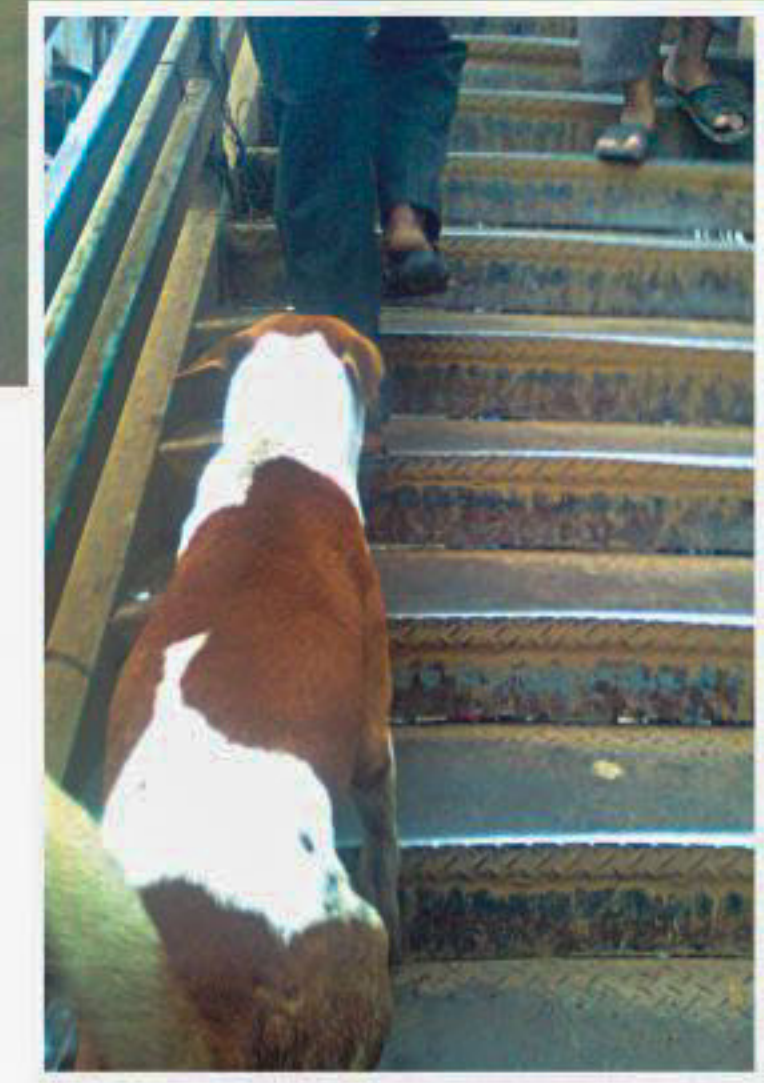




FUNNY pics

PHOTO: MD JAMIL AKHTER

LAW-ABIDING DOG ... He went up the stairs, inset, and went down the footbridge on the other end as if it was no big a deal. Several two-legged beings near the bridge in House Building area of Uttara were seen jay-walking to cross the road.



READER'S eye

Life has its own bloopers and oops. They all make our life colourful and fun-filled. Now pick up your mobile phone and click. Capture the funny side of life and send those to starreaderseye@gmail.com. We will share your lighter moments with others.

About hilsa and Teesta

FROM PAGE 1

Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh wanted to sign with Sheikh Hasina in 2011, saying it would hurt India's north Bengal.

But yesterday, while spending more than one and a half hours at the Gono Bhaban, she assured Hasina that the long-awaited pact would be inked "very soon" keeping intact the mutual interests of Bangladesh and West Bengal.

She urged the PM not to worry about it and pledged to play a positive role in signing the treaty.

Mamata, who was on the last day of her three-day visit, also assured Hasina that the bill to operationalise the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) with Bangladesh would be ratified in Indian parliament's budget session due to begin tomorrow.

Received by Hasina at the Gono Bhaban's main entrance around

12:40pm, Mamata held one-to-one talks with the PM for about 30 minutes after a meeting in the presence of delegations of the two countries.

It could not be known what the two leaders discussed at the one-to-one talks, but sources said their conversations for the rest of the time were mostly warm and friendly.

Before leaving the PM's residence at 2:15pm, Mamata and her team attended a luncheon -- some 12 food items, including four of hilsa, served.

Overwhelmed by the prime minister's hospitality, the West Bengal CM termed her Bangladesh visit "constructive, positive and historic", reports UNB.

"Her [PM Sheikh Hasina's] warmth and grace made me emotional. The visit was constructive, positive and, may I say, historic," she sweetened hours before her departure for home.

A flight of Air India carrying Mamata and her entourage left Hazrat

Shahjalal International Airport at 9:40pm.

Earlier at the Gono Bhaban, the PM presented a miniature boat to the West Bengal CM and urged the latter to take necessary measures so that boats can navigate on Bangladesh's rivers.

"Don't worry! Boats will sail on," Mamata replied, according to an Awami League leader.

Boat is also the election symbol of the ruling AL.

A press release issued by the Indian high commission said the chief minister conveyed to Dhaka the West Bengal government's commitment to the LBA, and Sheikh Hasina thanked her for the support.

Discussing the Teesta issue, Mamata said the matter should be resolved in a way that benefits both sides and safeguards the welfare of the populations dependent on the river, flowing from India to Bangladesh.

SSC exams deferred

FROM PAGE 1

Nahid said while announcing the new schedule at a briefing at his Hare Road residence in Dhaka yesterday.

Meanwhile, the 35th BCS preliminary examination time has been changed from 9:30am to 3:00pm on March 6, according to the Public Service Commission.

The education ministry said it is very unfortunate that the BNP and its allies have rejected the education ministry's plea to refrain from enforcing hartals on exam days, ignoring the suffering of around 15 lakh examinees, their teachers and families.

On top of the indefinite blockade since January 6, the alliance has been enforcing hartals since February 1, excluding Fridays and Saturdays, forcing the education ministry to reschedule exams every week.

The students could take only five exams in the last 18 days, all on the weekends. Earlier, the education ministry had to defer the exams on February 2, 4, 8 and 10 to February 6, 7, 13, and 14 respectively.

"All other exams will be held as per schedule, and we have made preparations accordingly," Nahid said.

Apart from the SSC and its equivalent exams, the country's overall education, business, manufacturing industries, agriculture, transport -- all sectors have been hugely affected by

the hartals and the blockade.

Blockade and hartal violence has already claimed the lives of 74 people. Some 300 victims of petrol bombs have suffered burns so far.

Meanwhile, at least eight people were injured in petrol and crude bomb attacks in different parts of the country yesterday.

Three Eden college students were injured as criminals hurled four homemade bombs in front of the college around 8:30pm.

Shahidul Islam Shaheed, joint convenor of Ramna ward-20 unit of Awami League, was injured in a crude bomb explosion in the city's Bangabazar area around 8:00pm.

Rickshaw puller Babul Ahmed was injured in a homemade bomb explosion near the National Press Club about 9:30pm. Two people were burnt in bomb explosion at Modhubagh in Maghbazar around 10:30pm.

All the victims are receiving treatment at the DMCH.

Criminals set fire to two trucks, one in Joypurhat and the other in Natore, last night.

Though movement of people in the capital seemed normal yesterday, passengers' movement between Dhaka and other districts saw a drastic fall.

GM Siraj, owner of SR Paribahan, said only about 10 percent of his buses are plying the inter-district roads.

"Many of the owners are failing to pay bank instalments while workers are going through hardship," he told The Daily Star.

Number of tourists visiting spots like the Cox's Bazar has dropped sharply, he said, sharing his recent experience.

"Cox's Bazar remains vibrant, full of tourists during this season but the beach looks almost deserted now," Siraj said.

Zinnur Ahmed Chowdhury Dipu, secretary general of Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh, said fewer numbers of foreigners are coming to Bangladesh these days while Bangladesh passengers flying to India or Southeastern and East Asian countries have also come down.

Meanwhile, Kabir Hossain Jewel, 22, a student of Dinajpur Degree College was burnt as activists of Jamaat-Shibir hurled a petrol bomb at a bus of Gazipura Paribahan in Signboard area in Gazipur.

With deep burns on his face and right arm, he was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital last night.

"I was sitting just beside the driver's seat. The window was closed, but as someone from a Jamaat-Shibir rally hurled a bomb, it broke the window glass and hit me. I got burnt while getting out of the bus," he told The Daily Star at the DMCH burn unit.

papers scheduled for the next week and the first week of March will also be put off.

As it has been in the past three weeks, we have reasons to predict that not a single exam will be held on schedule. If our prediction comes true, which we heartily expect not to happen, it will be an unprecedented record set by our politicians, a record they will be setting by leaving permanent scars on the minds of our future nation-builders.

In 2013, the SSC and equivalent examinations have also suffered political unrest. But in that year, students were at least able to take some of the

exams as per schedule as the BNP-led alliance had not enforced hartals as frequently as this year.

Given this year's situation, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid too seems to be in a hapless position as much as the students and their guardians.

Whenever he deferred any exams in the last three weeks, he hoped that the remaining exams would be held as per schedule. He even appealed to the BNP-led alliance not to enforce hartals on exam days.

But neither his hope nor his appeal has worked. It seems sick politics has gained an upper hand on everything.

CORPORATE ESPIONAGE ON GOVERNMENT

India vows to go tough

Detained journo claims it's a Rs 10,000 crore scam

AGENCIES

India yesterday vowed the "strictest punishment" against anyone involved in stealing top-secret documents from the country's petroleum ministry and selling them to energy companies, as the number of people arrested over the scam rose to 12.

Five senior executives from top refineries including Reliance Industries, Essar Oil and Cairn India were arrested late yesterday following a major police sting operation to trap those responsible for leaking the classified documents, police said.

Seven others -- two former ministry employees, a journalist, three middlemen and an energy consultant -- were also arrested between Thursday and Friday, it added.

"No guilty person will be spared and they will receive the strictest punishment possible," Home Minister Rajnath Singh told reporters in New Delhi, adding a possible nexus between corporate lobbyists and government officials had "been going on for a long time".

Police said the classified documents were sold to private energy companies and consultancies.

Of the twelve people arrested so far, two are former government employees who allegedly used duplicate keys, forged

identity cards to trespass into the ministry at night and disabled closed-circuit cameras to photocopy documents related to high-value bids and pricing policies.

Meanwhile, making a dramatic claim in the corporate espionage case, arrested journalist Santanu Saikia has said that it's a Rs 10,000 crore scam. Saikia made the dramatic admission while going out of the Delhi Police crime branch office, reports The Times of India.

"Quote me, I was doing a cover up," Saikia said. "It's a rupees 10,000 crore scam," he said.

Earlier, former newspaper reporter Saikia, detained by the police for interrogation over the leak of government documents had denied any links to the gang that stole papers from the petroleum ministry. He is, however, being extensively quizzed about certain documents found in his possession and his call records, police said.

The five company executives were scheduled to appear in a local court later yesterday, where police said they would appeal for their custody to carry out further interrogation.

Reliance, controlled by the country's wealthiest man Mukesh Ambani, derives most of its earnings from its massive energy operations.

Huge blaze guts 79-floor Dubai skyscraper

AFP, Dubai

Hundreds of panicked residents fled one of the tallest towers in Dubai early yesterday as a huge fire engulfed the skyscraper, causing extensive damage to its luxury flats.

The inferno gutted the upper part of the 79-storey Torch tower, triggering an evacuation of nearby blocks in the Dubai Marina neighbourhood, an AFP correspondent reported.

Amateur footage posted online showed fire engulfing the upper floors of the tower -- home to hundreds of expatriates -- with debris falling onto the road as strong wind fanned the flames.

Resident Mehdi Ansari told AFP that the fire alarm sounded at around 2 am (2200 GMT).

"I saw there was fire and pieces of the building falling down so I immediately took my wife and our baby. We took some important items and went down," he said.

"When we went to the staircase, it was full of smoke. Later the staircase got busier and smokier, the lights went off and some people panicked."

Civil defence teams cleared the building, which at 336 metres (1,105 feet) is one of the world's tallest residential towers.

Dubai police said there were no fatalities but seven people were treated at the scene for smoke inhalation.

A civil defence department statement said the fire began on the 51st floor and swept across the tower's facade affecting 20 storeys.

Target three

FROM PAGE 1

visit to Dhaka sometime this year, diplomatic sources said.

According to the sources, Mamata firstly flagged the Teesta issue and set the stage for a fresh dialogue on how to save the river and share the water resources with Bangladesh. She would now tell New Delhi to proceed for a deal.

She admitted that Bangladesh's demand for the Teesta water was legitimate and she had risen above the political constraints she faces in West Bengal, sources said.

Secondly, she gave the clearance for solving the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) issue, which envisages transfer of 111 Indian enclaves with a total area of 17,160.63 acres and a population of 37,334 to Bangladesh.

In turn, Bangladesh would hand over 51 enclaves with an area of 7,110.02 acres with a population of 14,215 to India.

The territories involved in the exchange are in Assam, West Bengal, Meghalaya and Tripura.

In September 2011, Mamata had pulled out of the delegation the then Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh was leading to Bangladesh, citing her reservations about the two issues.

Thirdly, Mamata yesterday pledged that her state government would never allow any fundamentalist, terrorist, or banned militant organisations like Jama'atul-Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) to operate in West Bengal.

An entourage member quoting the Trinamool Congress leaders said the chief minister was very much aware that she would face uncomfortable questions in Dhaka, not just on the Teesta but also on the Burdwan blast, which suggested that JMB operatives were using West Bengal as a safe haven.

Prayers, milad

FROM PAGE 1

Police had earlier beefed up security and vigilance around the office centring the milad.

No one except Moulana Mahmudul Hasan from a city madrasa was allowed to enter the office. Police did not stop him as he was entering the building with fruits and sweets for the programme.

Hasan, who had regularly been going to the office to recite the Holy Quran since Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko's death late last month, conducted the milad, insiders said.

After the milad, grapes and sweetmeats were distributed among the participants, mostly BNP leaders and Khaleda's personal and office staff who have been staying at the office.

Asked why Khaleda did not go to Shaheed Minar this year, BNP Vice-Chairman Selima Rahman replied, "How will she? Police are not allowing any of us to enter or exit the office."

However, BNP sources told The Daily Star that their ongoing blockade would have to be relaxed if Khaleda were to visit the Shaheed Minar. "In that case, the rhythm and pace of their movement might have been hampered," said a BNP leader requesting not to be named.

"Besides, the BNP chief fears the government will put her political office at Gulshan under lock and key once she goes outside," the leader added.

Considering all these, Khaleda sent a BNP delegation led by her adviser Enam Ahmed Chowdhury to pay respects to the language martyrs at the Central Shaheed Minar on her behalf.

Police kept Khaleda confined to her Gulshan office for more than two weeks since January 3. On January 5, she declared a countrywide nonstop blockade after she was barred from attending a scheduled rally in the capital.

The BNP chief, however, opted to continue staying there despite removal of police barricades from her office on January 19.

Meanwhile, law enforcers yesterday did not allow a team of retired officials of the three services and some of their family members to visit Khaleda with food.

Twelve ex-armed forces officials reached near Khaleda's office on Road-86 at Gulshan-2 around 12:30pm. But policemen stopped them on Road-88.

Anti-exam feat for BNP, allies

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry has yet to decide on the fate of exams of two more papers scheduled for Thursday.

But the present trend of enforcing hartal suggests that the 72-hour hartal will be extended till Friday morning as it has happened in the last three weeks. If it be so, Thursday's exams will also be deferred in all likelihood.

The students' strain began with the deferral of their first examination on February 2 due to a hartal on that day.

As there is no sign for an end to the ongoing political turmoil, it is very likely that exams of more than 20