

Fire guts stage for BAU anniversary celebrations

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

The stage built for the celebration of 57th founding anniversary of Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) in Mymensingh caught fire last night.

President Abdul Hamid is scheduled to attend the programme today as the chief guest.

Seven fire engines brought the fire under control around 12:15am, said Shahidur Rahman, deputy director (in charge) of Mymensingh Fire Service and Civil Defence. The fire had broken out around 11:15pm.

The cause of the fire could not be known immediately.

The president is also supposed to inaugurate "Haor and Chor Development Institute" at the university following today's programme.

BAU Proctor Atikur Rahman Khokon said they had handed over the charge of the stage to Special Security Force members in the evening.

He added that they would try their best to hold the programme if the president agreed to join.



PHOTO: COLLECTED

A fire burns the stage built for the 57th founding anniversary celebration of Bangladesh Agricultural University in Mymensingh last night. President Abdul Hamid is scheduled to attend the programme today.

4 more killed

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to exchange views with the local administration at Chittagong Circuit House.

Regarding the godfathers of drug trade, he said none of them would be spared. "There are a lot of questions regarding godfathers... there is no scope for sparing anyone."

Referring to Narcotics Control Act-1990, the secretary said it had many loopholes and it did not provide for detaining godfathers, reports one of our correspondents from Chittagong.

"The law will be amended by including provision for capital punishment in narcotics cases. It will be passed very soon and will be applied in capturing the big guns," said the secretary.

"We are not a narcotics producing country, we are the consumer. Had our neighbouring country been cooperative enough, it would have been easy for us to stop the drug business."

Bangladesh had a contract with Myanmar in 1994 for closing down the entry points of drugs but the Myanmar government did not take any action, Farid said.

"We held three meetings with them afterwards. They did not implement any of the decisions taken in those meetings. It shows that they are not at all interested in this matter."

THE 'SHOOTOUTS'

In Kushtia, Shamsuddin alias Sham, 38, an accused in eight cases, was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Bheramara upazila, reports our Kushtia correspondent.

The incident occurred around 3:30am when a police team raided Bankapur area after a tip-off that a group of drug peddlers were having a meeting there, said Aminul Islam, officer-in-charge of Bheramara Police Station.

Police also recovered 500 pieces of yaba, a gun and two bullets from the spot, he added.

Earlier, Sham was arrested twice in drug-related cases filed with Bheramara Police Station but got released on bail. He was last arrested on July 12, 2017, said the OC.

In Chapainawabganj, Khairul Islam, 42, an accused in eleven cases including seven on narcotics charges, was killed in a "gunfight" with Rab in Sadar upazila.

Abu Khayer, deputy commander of Chapainawabganj Camp of Rab-5, said an elite force team raided a mango orchard in Mollan village around 1:30am following information that a gang was engaged in drug peddling there, reports our correspondent from the district.

After the gunfight, Khairul was found with bullet injuries but others managed to flee. He was taken to Chapainawabganj Sadar Hospital where doctors declared him dead.

The Rab official also said they recovered one pistol, one magazine, four bullets and 117 bottles of Phensedyl from the spot.

In Dinajpur, Md Abdur Rahim, 45, an alleged drug peddler, was killed in a "gunfight" with police in Parbatipur upazila early today, reports our district correspondent.

Two narcotics gangs were meeting in Bannirghat village and they opened fire when police raided the area around 3:00am, said Habibiul Haq Proddhan, the OC of Parbatipur Police Station.

Later, police found bullet-hit Rahim and took him to Parbatipur Upazila

Rebels reach north Syria after south evacuations

AFP, Morek

Hundreds of rebels and their families evacuated from southern Syria after a deal was struck with the regime arrived yesterday in the country's northwest, an AFP correspondent said.

The evacuations from Quneitra province, which borders the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, came after a Russia-brokered agreement was reached earlier this week to see rebels hand over the territory to the Syrian regime.

Around 50 buses transporting fighters and their families reached the Morek transit route in the north of Hama province, which links regime and rebel-held territories, an AFP correspondent at the scene said.

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights monitor said the first convoy to reach Morek transported around 2,800 people.

They were to be transferred to other buses run by local NGOs, before travelling further north to temporary camps in rebel-held areas in Idlib and Aleppo provinces, the Britain-based monitor said.

"More than half of the evacuees are women and children," said Observatory head Rami Abdel Rahman.

"A second wave of departures is expected from Quneitra," he added.

Near the parked buses in Morek, a woman and five children waited by a cluster of small suitcases, the eldest among them carrying bottles of water and a blanket.

Men with light weapons slung on their backs shared a bite to eat and some water as they stood around waiting. Several wearing scarves wrapped around their faces.

The evacuations follow a deadly regime offensive on Quneitra, a thin, crescent-shaped province that lies along the buffer zone with the Israel-occupied Golan to the west.

Thousands protest Australia's refugee detention policy

AFP, Sydney

Thousands of people marched across major Australian cities yesterday calling for an end to Canberra's off-shore detention of asylum-seekers.

The government sends anyone who tries to enter the country by sea to camps on Papua New Guinea's Manus Island or on Nauru in the Pacific for processing.

Protestors took to the streets to mark the fifth anniversary of the policy's reintroduction, when in 2013 Canberra significantly toughened its stance, signing deals with the Pacific nations and declaring anyone arriving by boat had "no chance" of being settled in Australia.

"The policy that was introduced in 2013, to expel people -- the 'Fortress Australia' policy that they (the government) put in place -- that has to go," rally organiser Ian Rintoul from the Refugee Action Coalition told Sydney protesters.

"So we fight to close the detention centres on Manus and Nauru, but we fight in that process to bring them here."

Hundreds marched through Sydney shouting, "Free, free the refugees", with banners stating, "Five years too long, evacuate Manus and Nauru". Joint rallies were held in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra and Perth.

In search

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around two maunds of gold and some diamonds underneath that building saying Dilshad got those from airport and hid those in a drum under the house.

In 1986, Dilshad visited Bangladesh to recover the valuables in vain. He returned to Pakistan and passed away in 1987.

Alam somehow learned about it and came to Bangladesh in 2015. He stayed in that house as a tenant for eight months but failed to get anything.

On July 9, Tayob and Alam came to Dhaka from Teknaf to occupy the "hidden treasure" and discussed with the present owner.

As they failed to reach an agreement, Tayob filed the GD so that no single person could get the "treasure".

Tayob alleged he was in police custody for three days and was released on July 12.

Owner Monirul Alam also filed a GD on July 13 in this regard, said Dadon Fakir, officer-in-charge of Mirpur police.

Eventually, the district administration started the excavation in assistance with the police and the Department of Archaeology.

Sumon, caretaker of the house, told The Daily Star that four unidentified people including a woman offered him bribe for access to the house on July 12.

Monirul said he bought the house built on a two-katha plot from one Selim Reza in 2010 and planned to develop a new building there.



BNP's Sylhet City Corporation mayor candidate Ariful Haque Chowdhury along with leaders and activists of the BNP-led 20-party alliance stages a sit-in in front of the office of Sylhet Deputy Police Commissioner (south) protesting the arrest of two BNP men.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Arrest fear grips BNP ranks

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Friday night when he was campaigning for BNP mayor nominee Mujibur Rahman Sarwar in the city's Battala area.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, BNP standing committee member Khandakar Mosharrar Hossain said such arrests had taken place ahead of the city corporation polls in Gazipur and Khulna and the AL was "replicating the strategy of those polls" in Sylhet, Rajshahi and Barisal.

"By doing so, the government once again is proving that a free and fair election is not possible under it. The ruling party is exposing its intentions over the polls."

AL candidates won the polls in Khulna and Gazipur recently, beating their nearest rivals from the BNP.

Election Commission Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed said he didn't know about the reasons for yesterday's arrests.

"Police can arrest a person if he faces a specific allegation or criminal cases. We have directed the authorities concerned not to arrest anyone in the city corporation areas without any specific allegation," he told The Daily Star.

TWO HELD IN SYLHET

Police picked up BNP activists Rasel Ahmed and Sumon Ahmed in Dakshin Surma upazila's Jhalopara early yesterday.

After staging the sit-in, BNP mayor nominee Ariful said they would fight a legal battle to free the arrestees.

Ajbahar Ali Chowdhury, deputy commissioner (south) of SMP, said the arrestees were chargesheeted in a case filed with Osmaninagar Police Station

and arrest warrants were issued against the two.

However, Gouranga Das, sub-inspector of Osmaninagar Police Station and also the investigation officer of the case, contradicted the DC's views.

He said the two were arrested in a case filed under the Special Powers Act, 1974 and they were not facing arrest warrants.

The IO could not give details about the case but said one of the arrestees was accused in an arms case previously.

Earlier on July 12, Ariful had staged another sit-in in front of Bandarbaraz Police Fari demanding release of one of his supporters. The detainee was freed later.

EIGHT ARRESTED IN RAJSHAHI

Among the arrestees in Rajshahi are city Jamaat Nayeb-e-Amir Abu Yousuf Selim, BNP Joint Secretary Khandaker Wayes Karni Daimond, Iftiar Mahmud Babu and Golap Nabi.

Including the eight, police have so far picked up at least 18 members of BNP and Jamaat in the city since the beginning of electioneering on July 10.

Tofazzal Hossain, chief election agent of Bulbul, submitted a complaint to the returning officer yesterday.

He said police arrested at least seven BNP men and raided the houses of 22 others to "create fear among the party men".

Talking to reporters on the premises of the returning officer's office, Bulbul said, "We are seeing a new strategy of the police. The district police are arresting our men from the city and taking them to the police stations in different

upazilas as suspects in false cases."

Rakibul Hassan, OC of Puthia Police Station, said Jamaat leader Selim was arrested at his home in the city's Kalabagan area in a case filed with the police station on June 30 under the Special Powers Act.

Law enforcers picked up Nabi from Laxmipur area yesterday when he was returning home after campaigning for Bulbul.

Asked about the arrests, ASP Abdur Razzak, spokesman of Rajshahi police, said they had information that the arrestees were conspiring to carry out subversive activities on the polling day. 'ARRESTS MAJOR BARRIER TO FAIR POLLS'

Barisal BNP leaders alleged that police were raiding the BNP-Jamaat men's houses at night.

BNP candidate Sarwar said, "Police are picking up BNP-Jamaat leaders and activists during campaigning. It is a major barrier to holding free and fair polls."

Police said Jamaat leader Jahir was arrested in an arson case filed with Kotwali Police Station in 2017.

Kotwali OC Md Asaduzzaman said police produced the arrestee before a Barisal court yesterday and the court sent him to jail.

Helal Uddin, assistant returning officer in Barisal, said though police go under the control of the Election Commission during the election period, they can arrest any accused.

Police regularly send lists of arrestees to the returning officer mentioning the reasons for the arrests, he added.

Barapukuria plant faces shutdown

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"Around 1.42 lakh tonnes of coal was not there," said one of the visiting officials.

BCMCL officials said around 2.50 lakh tonnes of coal were on their yard until March 30 and the mine produced over 1.85 lakh tonnes between then and June 29. The plant burnt around 2.50 lakh tonnes of coal between April 1 and July 10. There was a deficit of 1.42 lakh tonnes.

Meanwhile, coal production has been suspended since June 29 to relocate equipment to a new coalface. Production is expected to resume at the end of next month, said a general manager of the mine.

The acute shortage could have been averted if the officials of BCMCL, the only supplier of coal to the plant, informed the plant authorities about

the coal crisis on time, said a number of officials of the plant, wishing anonymity.

"They never informed us officially about the crisis," said an official.

Power generation would continue at the plant if PDB, which operates the plant, gets enough coal.

PDB officials who visited the Barapukuria plant yesterday said they were worried because they were yet to assess for how long the power generation would be suspended.

On Thursday night, Ayub Khan Chowdhury was made managing director of BCMCL as additional duty after Petrobangla removed Habib Uddin Ahmed and Abul Kashem Prodhaniya from the posts of managing director and secretary of the mine. A general manager and a deputy general manager were also suspended.

Ayub Khan Chowdhury reached the coalmine site yesterday but refused to comment.

On Thursday, Petrobangla, which runs the BCMCL, formed a three-member probe body led by its director (operation) Kamruzzaman to investigate the coal going missing.

The power plant is the biggest buyer of coal produced at the mine. The plant pays around Tk 11,000 for a tonne but brickkiln owners pay Tk 17,000 per tonne.

The BCMCL management prefers selling to brickkilns. "It helps them get the annual profit bonus for officials," claimed a PDB official wishing not to be named.

The brickkiln owners and locals told The Daily Star that the mine area was secured and that they can't imagine how the coal went missing.

Gaza truce holds after flare-up

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But Hamas's decision to accept a ceasefire and not further retaliate reduced those fears for now.

As has been the case with previous such truces, Israel did not confirm the deal announced by Gaza's Islamist rulers that went into effect around midnight Friday.

There was relative calm yesterday except for one incident, with the Israeli army saying a tank struck a Hamas observation point east of Gaza City in retaliation for an attempted border infiltration in northern Gaza.

There were no reports of injuries in that strike and there was no major Israeli bombing campaign overnight or mortar fire from the Palestinian enclave toward Israel.

"With Egyptian and UN efforts, we reached (an agreement) to return to the previous state of calm between the (Israeli) occupation and the Palestinian factions," Hamas spokesman Fawzi Barhoum said in a statement early Saturday.

A senior Hamas official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told AFP the deal involved "the cessation of all forms of military escalation" including Israeli air strikes and Hamas mortars and rockets.

The source said that balloons and

kites attached with incendiary devices, which Palestinians have been floating over the border for months to spark fires inside Israel, were not included in the agreement.

Israeli politicians have been calling for a fierce response to the kites and balloons, which have caused damage amounting to millions of shekels (hundreds of thousands of dollars).

Israel's army and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office declined to confirm a truce was reached.

On Friday, three Hamas militants were killed as air raids sent fireballs exploding into the sky over Gaza, while Israel said rockets had been fired back at its territory. A fourth Palestinian was shot dead in protests near the border.

The United Nations urged all sides to step "back from the brink" of war after months of increasing tensions.

Friday's flare-up is the latest as demonstrations and clashes on the frontier since March have seen at least 149 Palestinians killed.

In addition to the shooting attack, Israel's army said explosive devices and around seven hand grenades were used, while a number of rockets were launched.

The army said it struck 68 Hamas sites including weapon manufacturing

sites, a drone warehouse and a military operations room.

It came only a week after the most severe exchange of fire between Israel and Palestinian militants in Gaza since the 2014 war.

Jason Greenblatt, US President Donald Trump's Middle East peace envoy, laid the blame for weeks of increasing tensions solely with Hamas.

"Hamas works relentlessly to destroy Israeli lives (& Gazans suffer as a result of Hamas)," he tweeted, while offering condolences to the soldier's family.

Hamas and Israel have fought three wars since 2008, most recently in 2014.

Israel has tightened its already crippling blockade of Gaza in recent weeks as it seeks to pressure Hamas to end the incendiary kites and balloons.

Hugh Lovatt, Israel-Palestine fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations think-tank, told AFP another round of conflict remained highly possible.

"The ceasefire is crucial and shows neither side wants war but it's only temporary reprieve," he said.

"Unless it can be consolidated and translated into a more permanent agreement that includes an easing of Israeli restrictions then we will continue to witness ever more frequent flare-ups."