

BNP'S SIT-INS

Foiled by attacks, arrests in many places

Party leaders blame law enforcers, ruling party men

STAR REPORT

While observing sit-ins in thanas and upazilas across the country yesterday, BNP leaders alleged they were obstructed and attacked in many places by law enforcers and ruling Awami League activists.

In several thanas in the capital, the opposition party held its programmes defying police barriers.

The sit-ins, held from 2:00pm to 4:00pm, were to protest the increase in prices of electricity and gas and the corruption of the Awami League government, and to push for the 10-point demand for the restoration of democracy, including the resignation of the government.

BNP central leader Anisur Rahman Talukder Khokon was arrested during the programme in Madaripur's Kalkini upazila, while Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, another party central leader and former minister, came under attack when he was going to join the programme in Patuakhali's Mirzaganj.

At least 15 people were injured when activists and leaders of AL and BNP

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BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru'l Islam Alamgir

leaders clashed in Laxmipur's Ramganj. In Sylhet, BNP chairperson's advisor Abdul Muktadir was arrested from the airport area, but was released after an hour.

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru'l Islam Alamgir condemned and protested the attacks and arrests.

“The government is instigating the BNP to take a different path by obstructing the peaceful programme. There were sit-in programmes at the thana-upazila level, but police put up barricades everywhere. In Dhaka city, most of the programmes were not allowed at the designated places, and so had to be held elsewhere,” he said while addressing an iftar party organised by Association of Engineers, Bangladesh, at the Ladies Club in the capital.

In Natore, Jubo League and Chhatra League activists have been accused of attacking BNP leaders and activists when they came to join the sit-in.

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Since Friday, around 60 local families took refuge at Rowangchhari Govt High School out of fear for their safety following Thursday night's alleged gunfight between members of the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF-Democratic) and Kuki-Chin National Front (KNF) that left eight people dead in Rowangchhari, Bandarban.

PHOTO: MONG SING HAI MARMA

LEAK OF DOCUMENTS ON UKRAINE WAR

Russia likely behind it

US officials say; Moscow charges US reporter with spying; Missile fired from Ukrainian-held territory downed over Crimea

REUTERS, Washington

Russia or pro-Russian elements are likely behind the leak of several classified US military documents posted on social media that offer a partial, month-old snapshot of the war in Ukraine, three US officials told Reuters on Friday.

A leak of such sensitive documents is highly unusual.

Meanwhile, Russian Federal Security Service investigators have formally charged Evan Gershkovich with espionage but the Wall Street Journal reporter denied the charges and said he was working as a journalist.

In Russian-controlled Crimea, a missile fired from Ukrainian-held territory was shot down over the Black Sea town of Feodosia, the Moscow-installed head of Crimea's administration said yesterday.

“A missile launched from Ukraine was shot down over Feodosia,” Sergei Aksyonov said on Telegram, without providing any detail on the kind of projectile in question.

Russia's TASS news agency quoted an adviser to Aksyonov, Oleg Kryuchkov, as saying that debris had fallen in a Crimean town, but no damage or casualties had been reported.

On the leaked US military documents, Kremlin and Russia's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The documents appear to have been altered to lower the number of casualties suffered by Russian forces, said US officials seeking anonymity, adding their assessments were informal and separate from the investigation into the leak itself.

The Kremlin and Russia's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

An initial batch of documents circulated on sites including Twitter and Telegram, dated March 1 and bearing markings showing them classified as “Secret” and “Top Secret.”

Later on Friday, an additional batch appearing to detail US national security secrets pertaining to areas including Ukraine, the Middle East and China surfaced on social media, the New York Times reported.

The US Justice Department said late on Friday it was in touch with the Defence Department and began a probe into the

leak. It declined further comment.

“We are aware of the reports of social media posts and the Department (of Defence) is reviewing the matter,” Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said.

A CIA spokesperson said the agency was also aware of the posts and was looking into the claims.

One document posted on social media said 16,000 to 17,500 Russian forces had been killed since Russia's February 24, 2022, invasion of Ukraine.

The United States believes the actual figure is much higher, at around 200,000 Russians killed and wounded, officials have said.

A Ukrainian presidential official said on Friday that the leak contained a “very large amount of fictitious information” and looked like a Russian disinformation operation.

On Evan Gershkovich being charged in Russia, TASS reported that Federal Security Service investigators had formally charged Gershkovich with carrying out espionage in the interests of the United States, but the 31-year-old journalist had denied the charge.



4 dead in Thailand shooting: police

AFP, Bangkok

At least four people were killed in a shooting in southern Thailand yesterday, police said, with local media reporting that officers were still searching for the suspect.

The attack started at about 5:00 pm (1100 GMT), in Khiri Rat Nikhom district in Surat Thani province -- roughly 600 km (370 miles) south of the capital Bangkok.

“Four people died,” local head of police Kriangkrai Kraikaew told AFP, declining to give further details.

The shooting happened near the home of a former village head, local media reported.

Thailand has high rates of gun ownership and there has been a steady trickle of violent incidents in the past 12 months, including one of the deadliest attacks in recent history.

All 8 victims

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Tariqul Islam, superintendent of Bandarban district police, said the bodies were handed over to the Bawm community leaders for burial yesterday after conducting autopsies.

The victims' names were published on various news outlets but police could not identify the victims yet, he said.

“As it came to the media, we also suspect that the deceased might be KNF members,” the SP said.

The BSC leader, however, could not confirm whether the deceased were KNF members.

According to the list provided by the BSC, six people from Zurvarawng village are -- Lal Tha Zar Bawm, 27, Sang Khum Bawm, 45, Wanlal duh Bawm, 35, Sun Thir Thang Bawm, 22, Bawi Rem Bawm, 17, and Lal Lian Ngak Bawm, 44.

Among them, Lal Tha Zar Bawm is an office assistant at Zurvarawng Government Primary School.

Jahim Bawm, 40, is from Pangkhyang Para while Bawm Ram Than Bawm is from Raunin Para.

Airports getting ready for more flyers, planes

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The country's aviation market had a yearly growth rate of about 10 percent over the last 10 years, according to the civil aviation ministry. The market is expected to be three times bigger in 15 years, he added.

Asked, aviation expert ATM Nazrul Islam said runway improvements will definitely help bigger aircraft's land and take off and larger terminal building will facilitate passengers. However, CAAB should also plan to install approach light systems and instrument landing systems to facilitate landings at night and during poor visibility in some airports.

THIRD TERMINAL, HSIA

Around 70 percent work of the third terminal has been done. The interior decoration and the installation of various equipment are being done at present, said the CAAB chairman, adding that a soft opening is expected in October.

Flyers will get international-quality services, he hopes.

Designed by celebrated architect Rohani Baharin, the 2.30 lakh square metre terminal will have 115 check-in counters, 64 departure and 64 arrival immigration desks, 27 luggage scanners, 12 boarding bridges, and 16 carousels.

There will be a new 63,000 square metre import and export cargo complex, a 5.42 lakh square metre

apron for 37 planes and a new car park for 1,230 vehicles.

Besides, cargo handling capacity will rise from 2.20 lakh tonnes to 7 lakh tonnes, the CAAB chairman said, adding that the HSIA will be able to handle around 2 crore passengers a year.

OSMANI INT'L AIRPORT, SYLHET

The load-bearing capacity of the runway and taxiways will be improved to allow large planes to land with a full load in Sylhet, CAAB officials said.

Besides, under the joint finance of the government and CAAB, another project at a cost of Tk 2,309 crore was taken to improve the passenger and cargo handling capacity at the airport.

Under the project, a 34,919 square metre terminal, a 6,892 square metre cargo complex, a control tower, a fire station, a maintenance building and a car park will be built.

The CAAB chairman, however, said due to a fault in the design, the work on the project is stalled.

COX'S BAZAR AIRPORT

Extending the runway was supposed to be complete by May, 2024, but steps have been taken to complete it by the end this year, said the CAAB chairman.

SHAH AMANAT INT'L AIRPORT, CHATTOGRAM

About 80 percent work of the runway

and taxiway enhancement at Shah Amanat International Airport in Chattogram has been completed. The project is worth Tk 540.52 crore.

SAIDPUR AIRPORT

The terminal building of Saidpur Airport is being modernised. The project is nearing completion, and when done, the terminal will be able to accommodate 670 people, up from the current capacity of 310.

Besides, a cargo building with some level of automation, an operations building with apron, taxiways, and a control tower will be built.

OTHER AIRPORTS

The runway of Barishal airport is also being extended from 6,000 to 7,500 feet at a cost of Tk 370 crore. The width of the runway is being increased from 100 to 150 feet.

Rajshahi Terminal Building Expansion Project is being implemented at a cost of Tk 76 crore. This will increase the passenger accommodation from 260 to 850.

The Jashore Terminal Building Expansion Project will increase passenger accommodation from 300 to 600 people. Ninety-nine percent work of the project has been completed.

Another project, costing Tk 566 crore, has been taken up to ease landing and take off of aircraft at Jashore, Saidpur, and Rajshahi airports.

He told a press conference that goods worth Tk 1,000 crore were lost to the fire.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Khandaker Golam Faruq yesterday said police were investigating whether the fire was the result of a conflict between groups of traders over the construction of a multi-storey at the site.

He said there was a dispute among the businessmen of Bangabazar over building a multi-storeyed building at the complex.

Motorcyclist killed in road crash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A motorcyclist was killed and two pillion passengers were injured as the motorcycle collided head-on with a truck on Thakurgaon-Pirganj road in Pirganj on Friday night.

Jatin Barman, 40, of Bhomradaha Malipara village in the upazila, died on the spot, said officer-in-charge of Pirganj Police Station.

The accident took place around 8:00pm. Police seized the truck but its driver and his helper managed to flee, he added.

A case was filed with the police station in this connection, he further said.

Two teenage boys stabbed

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Two teenage boys were stabbed allegedly by members of a teen gang in Sylhet city's Rikabibazar area around 10:00pm on Friday.

The victims are Sheikh Fahian Ferdous, 14, and Shafin Ahmed Shafi, 16, said police.

Fahian's father Sheikh Nasir filed a case in this connection with Kotwali Police Station yesterday.

On information, police arrested the accused immediately. The law enforcers are trying to arrest rest of the accused, said Azbahar Ali Sheikh, deputy commissioner of Sylhet Metropolitan Police.

The victims were admitted to Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital for treatment.

CU students dies 'by suicide'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A student of Chattogram University died reportedly by suicide yesterday evening.

Mochhammad Rokeya Khatun, fourth-semester student of management department, was staying in Shamsunnahar Hall.

According to her classmates, she was found hanging from the ventilator of her dormitory room around 4:00pm.

"I heard the student was rushed to the medical centre on the university campus. Doctors there referred her to Chattogram Medical College Hospital," said CU Assistant Proctor Arup Barua.

Doctors of CMCH declared her dead around 7:00pm when she was taken to the hospital, said Nurul Alam, in-charge of CMCH police outpost.

"After receiving the autopsy report we will be able to tell if this was a suicide," said CU Proctor Nurul Azim Sikder.

31 Ukrainian children returned from Russia

AFP, Kyiv

Thirty-one children have been brought back to Ukraine after being illegally taken to Russia from territories occupied by Moscow, a charity said yesterday.

"Today we are welcoming home 31 more children who have been illegally taken by Russians from occupied territories," Mykola Kuleba, head of the Save Ukraine charity, wrote on social media.

High traffic online

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others said they failed to get tickets even after they managed to log in.

For the first time, BR is selling all advance tickets online through the third-party vendor --Shohoz-Synesis-Vincen JV.

Prior to Eid, the Kamalapur Railway Station and other major stations used to see large crowds waiting for up to 30 to 40 hours at ticket counters. But that's not happening this year.

But, many people have pointed out that selling all tickets online will make it harder for people who don't know how to use the internet.

On Friday, the first day of advance ticket sales, things went fairly smoothly. However, yesterday, many people complained on social media that they couldn't access the site before all tickets for April 18 sold out.

When asked, Jubaer Hossain, vice president (business) of Shohoz, the company responsible for the ticketing system, said that people were having trouble logging in because so many users were trying to access the site at

the same time.

He said that a maximum of 500,000 people could access the site every minute, but the number of users exceeded the capacity when the tickets went on sale in the morning.

As a result, many had difficulties accessing the site, he explained, adding that however, those who could log in were able to purchase their desired tickets and that subsequently all tickets for April 18 were sold out.

However, BR Director (PR) Nahid Hossain Khan claimed that there were no issues with the online ticket purchases.

"People bought tickets faster today [Saturday] than they could yesterday [Friday]," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Meanwhile, tickets for April 19, 20, and 21 will go on sale today, tomorrow, and the day after tomorrow, respectively with more people likely to visit the website on these dates.

Eid-ul-Fitr is expected to fall on April 22 or 23.

Accept our demands

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the government resigns, who will hold the dialogue?

"BNP demands holding dialogue after the resignation of the government... they [BNP] are talking baseless and perplexed as the party has failed to wage movement," he said while addressing a programme on the ground of Sidhanta High School in the city yesterday.

"BNP wants to foil the election as the party knows that they will be defeated in the next general," added Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister.

As a reporter drew Fakhru'l's attention to President Abdul Hamid's memorial speech in the parliament marking the 50th anniversary of the national legislature, he said, "...There's one thing that I liked as he [Hamid] said the development without democracy is not universal. Another thing he said is that democracy can never be practised through conflict

and vengeance."

Fakhru'l bemoaned that the AL government is trying to destroy democracy instead of practising it.

The BNP leader said the current parliament has become completely dysfunctional, and important public issues are not discussed there.

Fariduzzaman Farhad, the coordinator of the Jatiyatabadi Samamona Jote, said they discussed with the BNP leaders the current political situation and the strategy to intensify the ongoing simultaneous movement to realise their 10-point demand including the resignation of the government and holding the next polls under a non-party neutral administration.

He said they will carry out their movement until the fall of the current Awami League government for ensuring a credible national election in the country under a non-party neutral administration.