

Hindu leaders meet prime minister

Raise issues of rights protection

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the country's Hindu community yesterday paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman at his Secretariat office and raised different issues regarding protection of minority rights.

After the meeting, Mahanagar Sarbajanin Puja Committee president Jayanta Kumar Deb told reporters that they informed the PM about incidents of harassment and deprivation faced by members of the community since August 5, 2024, including cases of job losses.

"We also raised issues such as the formation of a Minority Commission, enactment of a Minority Protection Law, establishment of a Hindu Foundation, and matters related to Debottor (Vested) Property Act," he added.

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Wooden structures and a makeshift bamboo shack turn the Shaheed Selim-Delwar Memorial into an eyesore, showing clear neglect and disrespect. The site near Dhaka University's Amar Ekushey Hall is now encroached upon by roadside businesses. HM Ibrahim Selim and Kazi Delwar Hossain were killed when a police truck rammed into a student protest against HM Ershad's autocratic regime in Gulistan in 1984. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

DMP continues drive to clear footpaths, roads

Mobile courts remove illegal structures; fines imposed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) continued its drive for a second consecutive day yesterday to reclaim encroached footpaths and roads, expanding operations to several new areas across the capital.

Joint teams of police, particularly from traffic divisions, along with mobile courts, carried out drives in Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Kazipara, Shewrapara, Uttara, Gulshan, Kalshi, Fakirapool, Dhaka Medical College Hospital, Tejgaon and other parts of the city.

During the drive, makeshift shops, roadside stalls and illegal extensions of businesses were removed from footpaths and roads.

In some places, authorities seized goods and dismantled temporary structures, while in others vendors were asked to vacate voluntarily.

A mobile court also conducted a drive at the entrances to the outdoor and emergency units of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, clearing illegal structures from nearby footpaths and roads, witnesses said.

Shop owners present at the time were allowed to take their belongings, while unattended items were confiscated and taken away in law enforcers' pickup vans.

Law enforcers said stricter measures were enforced on the second day, following warnings issued during the first day of the drive.

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PM expresses solidarity with UAE amid ME conflict

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Tarique Rahman has conveyed Bangladesh's firm solidarity with the UAE government and brotherly people in the context of the ongoing war in the Middle East.

Tarique, in a letter to UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, expressed deep concern over the attacks, the loss of lives, injuries and damage to property there, according to a foreign ministry statement.

The PM's Foreign Affairs Adviser Humayun Kabir handed over the letter to the UAE Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, during a meeting in Abu Dhabi on April 1.

The PM also expressed his appreciation for the UAE's continued support for Bangladeshis expatriates and for the measures taken to ensure their safety and well-being.

He reaffirmed Bangladesh's readiness to provide any necessary support and invited the UAE president to visit Bangladesh.

The UAE foreign minister condoled the deaths of two Bangladeshi expatriates in the attacks and

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BAILEY ROAD FIRE

'Restaurant locked exits to ensure payments'

CID submits charge sheet accusing 22, including owners, managers

TOUSIF KAIUM

Customers were allegedly locked inside a restaurant during the deadly blaze at Green Cozy Cottage on Bailey Road to ensure bill payments, according to findings by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).

The investigation also found that stairways and emergency exits were obstructed by gas cylinders and other materials, significantly increasing the death toll.

The fire broke out on the night of February 29, 2024, killing 46 people – three from burns and 43 from suffocation.

Later, a case was filed with Ramna Police Station, and the CID was tasked with the investigation.

Nearly two years later, the agency submitted a charge sheet to a Dhaka court yesterday, naming 22 individuals as accused.

They include Md Ramjanul Haque Nihad, managing director of Amin Mohammad Foundation, and Sohel Siraj, owner of Kacchi Bhai, along with several other restaurant owners and safety managers.

CID investigation officer Inspector Md Shahjalal Munshi confirmed the submission to The Daily Star.

According to the charge sheet, the main gate of Kacchi Bhai was locked shortly after the fire broke out to prevent customers from leaving without paying their bills.

However, Sohel Siraj denied the

allegation.

"God forbid; we would never stoop so low for our business. This is a completely baseless allegation. I do not know why CID has made such a report. Rather, 44 of our staff members broke the glass and escaped. At the same time, many of them used fire extinguishers to try to put out the fire," he told The Daily Star.



The investigation also found that stairways and emergency exits were obstructed by gas cylinders and other materials, significantly increasing the death toll.

Siraj added that he was arrested by Ramna police after the incident and released eight days later.

The CID found that as the fire spread, people on different floors tried to reach the rooftop but were unable to do so, as the eighth floor and rooftop had been illegally converted into a duplex restaurant.

Many also attempted to escape through the staircase, but it was blocked by gas cylinders and other materials, trapping them inside.

Investigators identified multiple safety violations in the building. Although it was approved for commercial use up to five floors and residential use for three, it had been illegally extended to eight commercial floors.

None of the 10 restaurants in the building had valid documentation, according to the charge sheet. Flammable decorative materials helped the fire spread quickly, and the building lacked an effective ventilation system.

The rooftop, which should have remained open, had been enclosed as a duplex restaurant and was often kept locked, hampering rescue efforts.

CID sources said the fire likely started from an electric kettle at a ground floor coffee shop named "Cha Chumuk".

On the night of the incident, Kacchi Bhai had high customer traffic due to special leap year offers. Investigators allege that restaurant manager Jain Uddin Jisan ordered the main gate to be locked, contributing to the fatalities.

A CID official said the manager's decision was a key factor in several deaths, leading to his inclusion in the charge sheet.

Rejecting the claim, Siraj said, "It is true that there was an offer that day, but it was only on Foodpanda. There was no dine-in offer. This is also propaganda against us."

Four special assistants to prime minister appointed

STAR REPORT

The government has appointed four special assistants to the prime minister on a contractual basis, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of Public Administration yesterday.

According to the notification, Tanvir Ghani has been appointed special assistant for investment and capital market affairs; Bijon Kanti Sarkar for Hindu, Buddhist, Christian and ethnic minority affairs; Shakirul Islam Khan Shakil for overseas employment in the Asia-Pacific region, and Saiyed Abdullah for youth employment.

Under the Rules of Business, 1996, the prime minister made the appointments, said the notification.

Of the four, Tanvir Ghani and Bijon Kanti Sarkar will hold the rank of state minister. Tanvir is chairman of Osiris Group, an Asian investment firm, while Bijon serves as adviser to the BNP chairman and chairs the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Welfare Front.

Shakil, a former student and teacher of Bangladesh Agricultural University, is currently a faculty member in the Department of Microbiology at Oita University, Japan. Saiyed Abdullah is a former law student at Dhaka University.

'He said he'd return to eat; he never did'

Mother recounts memory of son while testifying against Ziaul at ICT-1

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A grieving mother told a tribunal yesterday that her teenage son, who had been waiting for lunch, left their Gendaria home in Dhaka in 2011 after receiving a phone call just as she was about to serve the meal, and never returned alive.

She said she waited with his meal until Asr prayers, but her son Sajal, then 17, did not return. She and her elder son later searched for him at hospitals, police stations and other places for over a week.

"The police did not help us in any way," she told the tribunal.

Nine days later, on July 13, 2011, the family learned that two bodies were lying in a hospital in Gazipur. Her elder son Azad went there with a friend and identified Sajal's body.

"The next day, we brought the body and buried him at Jurain graveyard," she said.

Bhulu Begum, a 52-year-old domestic worker, was testifying before the International Crimes Tribunal-1 as the second prosecution witness in a crimes against humanity case against Maj Gen (ret'd) Ziaul Ahsan.

She said her son had been involved in BNP politics and regularly attended rallies and meetings.

"I later came to know that a senior officer of the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) picked up Sajal and killed him in Gazipur because of his political activities," she said, breaking down in tears.

"I want justice for my son's killing," she said, as Ziaul sat in the dock.

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Crackdown on fuel hoarding intensifies

7,900 litres seized, two fined Tk 30,000 in two districts

STAR REPORT

The government has continued drives against illegal fuel hoarding amid shortages that have disrupted daily life and livelihoods in several districts.

Law enforcers and mobile courts seized more than 7,900 litres of diesel and petrol in separate operations in Patuakhali and Sirajganj yesterday, while fishermen in Kurigram reported acute difficulties in accessing fuel.

In Patuakhali, police seized 6,200 litres of fuel – 3,200 litres of diesel and 3,000 litres of petrol – from a trawler anchored near a ferry ghat on the Andharmanik river in Kalapara upazila around 9:30am. A mobile court later fined the owner of a local filling station Tk 20,000 for supplying the fuel to the trawler.

Kalapara Upazila Executive Magistrate Yasin Sadiq, who led the court, confirmed the development.

In Sirajganj, a mobile court seized around 1,729 litres of diesel and petrol from an unauthorised fuel shop at Sonamukhi Bazar in Kazipur upazila early yesterday.

The shop owner was fined Tk 10,000 for illegal stockpiling, said Kazipur Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mostafizur Rahman, who led the drive.

Despite the enforcement drives, fuel scarcity has left livelihoods at risk for many.

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The escalator linked to a footbridge in Banani, Dhaka lies out of service, covered in rust, grease and dirt. Meant to aid the elderly, injured and persons with disabilities, its failure now limits safe road crossing. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

31 state-owned industrial units currently running at loss

Industries Minister tells parliament

UNB, Dhaka

Industries Minister Khandakar Abdul



Muktaadir yesterday told the parliament that a total of 31 state-owned enterprises under the industries ministry are currently operating at loss.

"Five state-owned enterprises of Bangladesh Steel and Engineering Corporation [BSEC], 14 of Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation [BSFIC] and 12 of Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation [BCIC] under the industries ministry are operating at loss," he said.

The minister made the disclosure in response to a question from treasury bench lawmaker

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