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Indigenous people demand constitutional recognition

By Staff Correspondent

Indigenous people living in the country's northern and southern regions yesterday put forward a 9-point charter of demand including constitutional recognition for them to protect the entity of some 18 tribes.

The demands were made by a rally of indigenous people organised by the Jatiya Adibashi Parishad (National Council of Indigenous People) at the Diploma Engineers' Institute in the city yesterday. Some 5,000 indigenous people of different tribes from Naogaon, Chhajnawabganj, Natore, Pabna, Dinajpur, Rangpur, Bogra, Sirajganj and Faridpur attended the rally.

Their other demands include permanent settlement of lands, formation of a ministry and a land commission for the indigenous people, legal aid for those whose lands were illegally occupied by vested quarters, special facility in all educational institutions and quota in government services, rehabilitation of the rootless indigenous people, repeal of the vested properties law and setting up of a cultural academy for them.

Presided over by the Parishad's president Anil Marandi, the rally was addressed by, among others, Barrister Amirul Islam, Fazle Hossain Badsha, PCJSS leader Mongal Kumar Chakma, Pahari Gano Parishad leader Shaktipad Tripura, leaders of the indigenous people Rabindranath Saren, Gonosh Saren, Nabin Chandra Sardar, Madan Kumar Baroar, Durbin Kishuk and Nares Chandra Orao.

Left political leaders Rashed Khan Menon, Nirmal Sen, A.F.M. Mahbubul Haq, Khalequzzaman Bhuiyan, Mujahidul Islam Selim, Bimol Biswas, journalists Foyez Ahmed and Ataus Samad and educationist Shawkat Ali attended the rally.

Barrister Amirul Islam said though there is no mention of minority community in the Constitution, it guarantees equal rights to all citizens irrespective of cast and religion. So, the indigenous people have equal rights and the question of curbing those does not arise at all, he added.

He assured the indigenous people of providing legal aid to protect their rights and said there are public funds in all districts and monitoring cells in

district bar councils to provide legal aid to poor people.

Turning to the CHT peace accord, he urged the government to immediately implement the agreement fully and overcome the political problems. "After signing of the agreement, now it is the duty of the government to rehabilitate the indigenous people socially, politically and economically in their respective areas".

Leaders of the Adibashi Parishad said a large number of indigenous people have been living in country's northern region for several hundred years and have actively participated in different historical movements including the War of Liberation but no government after independence took any welfare-oriented programmes for them.

They said the indigenous people in the north region are very peaceful and never did any subversive activities. Vested groups forcibly occupied their lands and properties but successive governments did nothing for them. The government has done "everything" for the indigenous people of country's eastern region, they said.

Welcoming the CHT peace accord and the CHT Affairs



Indigenous people at a rally at the Diploma Engineers Institute in the city yesterday. —Star photo

Armed AL activists

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urged the EC to take adequate security measure so that voters can go to polling centres.

He urged the EC to announce the security measures over microphone across the constituency to encourage people to cast votes.

Thanking the EC for removing the Returning Officer for the constituency (the DC), Mannan Bhuiyan said there is still apprehension about holding of a free and fair election as the DC is holding all executive authority and the new RO, TNOs and all other officials concerned are directly under his authority.

He demanded immediate removal of other officials who, he said are openly working in favour of AL candidate. He also demanded trial of the DC for his 'misdeeds' as allegations against him have been 'proved.'

He hoped that the EC would enforce its authority to ensure free and fair election. "The EC is a constitutional body, it has immense authority and it can apply that during election period."

The BNP secretary general demanded immediate release of all arrested leaders and activists of BNP prior to election in the interest of free and fair election.

Bhuiyan alleged that the ruling party has used government relief in Bera-Sujanagar constituency to influence the voters. A huge quantity of relief materials was distributed among people of the constituency (Pabna-2) after the flood with the objective of getting votes.

The AL leader said the Awami League has been desperately trying to get its candidate AK Khanakter, elected. He was a minister in Ershad regime, defeated twice in previous parliamentary polls and is a guest candidate for the Pabna-2 seat.

Bhuiyan said, M.K. Arif, Haris Chowdhury and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy were also present at the press briefing.

Marubeni

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were verbally asked by the secretary of the ministry to prepare the proposal and submit it to the Purchase Committee for approval, the sources said.

One source said, "It is not

clear why this proposal was made. The government has signed agreements for three barge-mounted plants and the 360 MW Haripur Power Plant. It is now negotiating with US company AES for the first phase of Meghnaghat plant. All these plants start power generation at a time, the government will not be able to pay them in Dollars. The proposal for the second phase of Meghnaghat plant is just unnecessary now."

Already one of the three barge-mounted plants has started generating 110 MW power from October. The monthly bill of each barge-mounted plant is around Tk 15 crore in foreign currency. Under the present arrangement, the finance ministry will provide the foreign currency to buy power from these plants.

The finance ministry is uncomfortable about random signing of private power plant projects, said the source.

The World Bank has also given similar notes. In a recent letter it suggested the government to evaluate the economic impact of the private sector plants for which contracts have been signed.

The World Bank asked the government to go slow in the power sector. It said that the system loss in the power sector was still high and Bangladesh could not even afford to pay for the electricity to be generated by all the barge-mounted plants, said the source quoting the WB note.

The election to the executive committee of Dhaka University Teachers' Association (DUTA) for the year 1999 will be held on December 30, reports UNB.

The polling to elect 15 executive committee members, including president, vice president, secretary, joint secretary and treasurer, will be held at the university club from 10 am to 2 pm, said a DUTA press release yesterday.

DUTA election December 30

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Implement verdicts of People's Court

By Staff Correspondent

Ministry, they said the government has given many facilities to the tribal people in the country's eastern region but not to the indigenous people in northern region. Even they are not being considered as a disadvantaged community.

The indigenous people are not being benefited from the government's spending of funds for the development of the indigenous people and protection of their religion and cultural heritage, they alleged.

The indigenous people who attended the rally belong to Urao, Shaotal, Pahari, Mal Pahari, Bhumis, Rajawor, Mahali, Ganshi, Mahato, Rajbangshi, Barman, Koanch, Mamri, Dalu, Garo, Kurami, Karmaker and Rabidas tribes.

The scheduled rally delayed for a couple of hours as the Journey of the indigenous people obstructed due to collapse of a Bailey bridge at Sherpur. They came from northern region in 60 buses, organisers said.

Different aboriginal tribes presented their respected musical soiree at the rally. The rally, over, hundreds of participants brought out a rally in the city in the afternoon and paraded different streets.

Alleging that the government distanced itself from the demands Jahanara Imam set forth, SNS expressed sorrow that no government seriously considered the verdict of the People's Court; even Awami League which was a partner of the movement did not take any action against the killers and collaborators of 1971 after coming to power.

Since the government agrees to Jahanara Imam's movement, she can be shown full respect if her demands are met, it said.

Meanwhile, Narigantha Probaratana hailed the decision to award Jahanara Imam with the Rokeya Padak. Urging the government to name the Old Elephant Road from Bata Crossing to Gaucharia Crossing after Jahanara Imam by December 16, Probaratana regretted that the road was yet to be named after Jahanara Imam though the authorities concerned agreed on the issue much earlier.

Hasina

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ging by staging a "mock" parliamentary election on February 15, 1996.

Those who are clamouring about rigging were pulled down from power through movement on charge of vote fraud," she told the meeting amidst cheers from her audience.

Hasina said her party, which fought for democracy and franchise, was never ousted through mass movement, nor was it removed from power by ballot. Rather it is a bloody coup and killing through which Awami League was unseated.

In a flashback on the launch of BNP by Ziaur Rahman while in power, Hasina said this party hatched out a conspiracy to stage rigging for consolidating their ill-gotten rule.

About Khaleda's warnings of forcing Awami League to bow out, Hasina retorted: Awami League won't have to do that. It is BNP that had to stand down from power in the face of mass movement by giving undertaking.

The prime minister warned that conspiracy was being hatched to trigger unrest and disrupt development and people's welfare. She said Awami League is pledge-bound to steer the country with the support of the people.

Hasina said BNP leadership had been issuing warnings of overthrowing the government since the trial of the killers of Bangabandhu started. Those threats were spearheaded to protect the self-confessed killers. "We don't understand why Begum Zia has got such hooliganism with the killers."

He demanded immediate withdrawal of the Deputy Commissioner and legal action against him.

Brahmanbaria

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Rashid. They put forward a five-point demand which included removal of ADAB president Kazi Farook, president of Trinamul Janosangathan and Kazi Rakib.

The demands also include punishment of armed terrorists, ban on meetings and "antisocial" activities of NGOs and medicare for those injured in Monday's clash.

After the meeting, the mob attacked the office and residence of the DC and residences of the SP, judges and the TV relay station.

A groaning Abdi said that at dawn every day, her mistress used to kick her to awaken her. "That's not the end. She also beat me regularly on the plea that tea was not made properly."

The victim's mother Juthi Begum said in agony: "I do not know whether my daughter will be able to see again. They could send my daughter back to me if she could not work well. But why did they torture my daughter?"

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vices, if extended, could be better utilised as an ambassador. He is due to go on LPR on January 25.

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