

Govt disowns Khatib's comments

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The government has disowned the recent comments of the Khatib of Baitul Mukkarram National Mosque Moulana Obaidul Haq.

This was stated by Foreign Secretary Shamsher Mabin Chowdhury at a press conference

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	Sun Rises	Sun Sets
Dec 27		5-19 pm
Dec 28	6-40 am	

Prayer Timings

Dec 27		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	5-30	6-00
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	3-45	4-00
Maghrib	5-25	5-30
Esha	7-15	7-45

Source: Islamic Foundation

300 partymen, minority people killed since govt's takeover: AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League yesterday claimed that 300 party leaders, workers and members of the minority community were killed and 1500 injured since the government took over.

Another 296 AL leaders and workers were murdered and 8,303 injured in 642 incidents of terrorist attack during the tenure of the caretaker government till the (October 1) polls day, acting president of the party Abdus Samad Azad alleged at a press conference held at the party central office.

In his seven-page written statement, Abdus Samad provided figures in support of his claims. The figures showed that during the first 75 days of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's government, 88 incidents of abduction took place and over 300 women including 50 minor girls were raped in the country.

The ruling alliance has let lose "brute terrorism" in the country he said and urged the people to pre-

pare for a movement against the BNP-Jamaat government.

"By virtue of its brute majority (in parliament), the Khaleda-Nizami government has presented the nation a chapter of brute terrorism."

He termed it a "barbaric chapter" in the country's history and said AL will announce movement programmes soon, but did not specify.

"An objective situation is prevailing in the country now for a movement. AL is not suffering from organisational weaknesses."

AL had earlier said that it would announce a movement programme after the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Regarding the party's joining parliament sittings, he said, "We never said we will not go to parliament. We've every right to join the parliament. But, there has to prevail a congenial atmosphere for that."

Referring to President Badruddoza Chowdhury's post-Eid visit to his residence, Samad Azad said, "He (the President) made no

specific proposal regarding our joining the parliament."

In this connection he also mentioned recent "attacks on AL supporters" in different villages, cancellation of public holidays on birth and death anniversaries of Bangabandhu, annulment of the special law for AL chief Sheikh Hasina's security and filing of "false" cases against her and her cabinet colleagues and violence against minority community people.

He also claimed that hundreds of minority community families were taking refuge in India but could tell a questioner the number.

The elderly AL leader alleged large scale forcible occupation of public property since the government took over. "A minister occupied the Muktijoddha Sangsad office and a ruling party lawmaker led a gang to occupy a student dor

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Female students to get free education up to higher secondary level

BSS, Dhaka

The Executive Committee of National Economic Council (ECNEC) yesterday decided to introduce Taka 100 monthly stipend for all primary school students, scrapping the existing Food for Education programme.

The meeting also decided to introduce free education for female students up to higher secondary level instead of previous SSC level, a planning commission press release said here.

The meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in the chair at the NEC building decided that the female students securing first division in SSC would receive monthly stipend at the rate of Taka 65.

The meeting approved 10 development projects to be completed at

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Team due in city Jan 7 IMF to discuss BoP support, other issues

INAM AHMED

An International Monetary Fund (IMF) team will arrive here January 7 to discuss a government request for a standby arrangement and purchase under compensatory financing facility.

The IMF bailout team will stay here for a week during which it will review progress in various sectors since the last team's visit on November 8.

The government now desperately needs balance of payment support as an Asia Clearing Union (ACU) accumulated payment of two tranches amounting to about US\$ 300 million is due in January.

Tuesday's foreign exchange reserves were \$1.23 billion, up from November 8 figure of \$1.08 billion when the last IMF team came.

The reserves improved on increased flow of remittance on the eve of the Eid, sources said. But the trend does not look sustainable with a grim export prospect in the aftermath of September 11 attacks and global recession.

So, if the reserves remain around the recent normal of \$1.10 billion, with the payment to ACU it would dip to as low as around \$900 million.

Moreover, another payment will be due in March, putting fresh pressure on the reserves.

In the circumstances, the government is trying to get the 533.33 million SDR standby facility before March and the compensatory financing facility to foot the bill for oil import.

The government is also working on a poverty reduction paper to get this standby facility.

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Body formed to assess gas reserve

UNB, Dhaka

The government has formed two committees to assess the gas reserve and ascertain alternative use of gas in the national interest.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday endorsed the two committees having nine members each, official sources said.

The committees will submit their reports to the government within 30 days.

Dr Nooruddin will head the technical committee for assessing the gas resource potential and ascertaining the recoverable

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Erratum

In the last paragraph of a front page news item carried in The Daily Star on Wednesday headline, "Pak forces fully prepared to face challenges: Musharraf," the partition of the sub-continent was referred to have taken place in 1847 instead of 1947.

We regret the printing error.