

Govt digging grave for democracy, says AL

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League yesterday accused the government of "digging the grave for democracy" and called upon the people to launch movement to protect their democratic rights.

The party leaders also bitterly criticised the government for what they called persistently barring the opposition from exercising its basic democratic and political rights.

They were addressing a press conference at the party's Dhanmondi office in the city.

"This government is digging the grave for democracy, human rights and rule of law. Today, we call upon the people and the civil society to join us in a movement to protect democracy," AL Presidium member Abdus Samad Azad said.

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, Presidium members Tohal Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzaq, Suranjit Sengupta, Amir Hossain Amu, Sajeda Chowdhury and Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid were also present.

They referred to some recent incidents including government's refusal to allow AL to hold programmes at Paltan Maidan in the city and at Khulna Circuit House Ground and its front organisations

to bring out processions in the city. They also briefed newsmen on the AL Presidium meeting held on Tuesday night.

Samad Azad said the meeting discussed the government's "undemocratic activities and repression on the opposition". The meeting strongly condemned the government's cancellation of AL chief Sheikh Hasina's scheduled rally at Khulna Circuit House Ground on coming Friday and arrest of former minister MK Alamgir.

Previously, government cancelled Hasina's programme for security reasons, citing recovery of a bomb from Khulna Rail Station on March 11.

Earlier, government also barred AL from organising a 'mass hunger strike' at the Paltan Maidan to protest the move to remove Bangabandhu's portraits from public offices. AL later rescheduled the programme for March 24, to be staged at the Osmani Uddyan.

The AL leaders came down heavily on the government for the "unlawful" treatment to MK Alamgir, journalist Sharif Kabir and AL chief's personal assistant Bahauddin Nasim. Alamgir was arrested under Section 54 and taken on remand twice without any "specific charge" against him.

Hasina

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In reply to a question, she said when the Prime Minister cannot take her own MPs into the House, it was doubtful that she would be able to take the opposition back to parliament.

Hasina said her party MPs had taken decision to submit their resignation letters to her in protest against deteriorating law and order, terrorism, price spirals, rigging in October 1 polls, torture on her party men and the government's latest move to bring down the portrait of father of the nation.

The ex-PM observed that they would not take any decision out of emotion, but their future course would be taken reflecting the reality on the ground and people's aspirations. "We want to work together with the people of this country," she said without elaborating.

Earlier, the AL chief addressed an "anti-terrorism workers meeting" at the Tungipara auditorium.

Holcim case

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Mohammad Khorshed Alam, Territory Manager of Holcim (Bangladesh) Ltd, filed the case against the accused with the CMM's Court, Dhaka on Tuesday.

They were charged with damaging reputation of Holcim by carrying a report titled, "Holcim black cement: Whether it is cement or ash" in the Jugantor's March 1 edition.

The complainant of the case also alleged that the report had said Holcim marketed the cement in the country without verifying its quality.

Surface water

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and how much wasted?"

He said, "We tried to find out from donors how much money they spent in Bangladesh for groundwater extraction and research. But none could give us statistics. We then prepared an estimated figure.

"Taking groundwater would mean more diseases in future", he said.

Prof Mahmudur Rahman, Coordinator of DCH, said, "Bangladesh has the highest amount of per capita surface water in the world. But despite that, policies forced us to extract groundwater which is a source of poison."

He said, the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE) has yearly plans for sinking deep tubewells. But as per tests, water supplied in 28 municipalities are contaminated with arsenic, some having levels beyond the WHO-recommended safety limit."

He said it is less costly to develop surface water as the main resource of drinking water.

Many countries having abundant surface water have policies for very limited use of groundwater. But in Bangladesh, more emphasis is given on groundwater, he said.

"We strongly urge the policymakers to wake up and stop continued extraction of groundwater. It is time that we should shift to better management of surface water," Prof Rahman said.

An unnatural death (UD) case was filed in this connection.

College student

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Kabir, a second year student of Bangla College at Mirpur.

Mirpur police however said the student was engaged in extortion and was shot accidentally by his own revolver. Asked whether they have recovered the revolver, police replied in the negative and said two of his accomplices fled the spot with it.

A unnatural death (UD) case was filed in this connection.

Khulna AL rally

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Maidan tomorrow afternoon, sources said.

Local AL leaders said the district administration would be held responsible for any unpleasant situation if the Awami League were barred from holding the public meeting at the Maidan merely on the pretext of security reasons. They hoped that good sense would prevail and the administration would withdraw its decision.

Earlier on Tuesday, Khulna AL leaders received a letter from the office of the Deputy Commissioner, which said that the AL was being denied permission to hold its public meeting at the Circuit House Maidan for security reasons, and suggested the Khalishpur Haji Mohsin College Ground instead for the purpose.

"We don't know of any other place more secure and suitable in the entire metropolitan city than the Khulna Circuit House Maidan for holding public meetings by leaders like Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia," said AL leaders in a press conference held yesterday morning.

They alleged that the government influenced the district administration to change its earlier decision to allow the meeting at the Maidan, saying that the Deputy

Commissioner on March 9 had given them verbal permission to that effect. Following the permission, they took up brisk programmes including booking the VVIP room for Hasina. The special branch of KMP also allowed them to go on with the programmes with effect from March 12. But now, we are taken aback at the administration's refusal to allow the Circuit House Maidan to be used for holding the public meeting, the Awami League leaders said.

The press conference was addressed among others by city AL president Alhaj Advocate Manjurul Imam, president of district AL Sheikh Harun-ar-Rashid, former state minister Talukder Abdul Khaleque and former whip Mostafa Rashid Shuja.

Meanwhile, an explosive situation is prevailing in the city centring the conflict between the main opposition and the district administration over the matter.

Even some local BNP leaders are reportedly unhappy with the stand taken by the district administration.

"I do not know why the Deputy Commissioner is denying the fundamental rights of a political party to hold public meeting at the Circuit House Maidan," said a local MP on condition of anonymity.

PM tells JS Bangladesh against all forms of terrorism and religious violence

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday said Bangladesh stands for peace and stability denouncing terrorism and religious violence in South Asia.

In response to supplementary questions during the PM's question time in parliament, she said although there was no specific agenda on religious intolerance at the last SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu, the question of terrorism in the region was discussed by the forum leaders.

In reply to a question of Jamaat member Abu Syed Md Sadat Hossain, she said during her bilateral meetings with the Pakistani President and the Indian Prime Minister the issue of religious intolerance was discussed.

About repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh, the prime minister told GM Kader of Jatiya Party that she had raised the issue with Pakistani President Gen Pervez Musharraf, who assured of looking into the matter and taking decision after discussion.

In reply to Manjurul Hossain of BNP, she said the question of inclusion of Myanmar in the seven-member South Asian bloc was discussed with the SAARC leaders during retreat, but no consensus could be reached on the issue.

"It would be possible to induct Myanmar in SAARC if there is consensus of all member states," she said about provision of the charter of the regional grouping.

Hasina's son

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After preliminary investigation, Bhuiyan said, it was found that Joy identified himself as representative of the prime minister during a meeting with US Assistant Trade Representative Rosenbaum on the issue of GSP.

Former state minister for foreign affairs Abul Hasan Chowdhury, who was to lead the Bangladesh side, could not attend that meeting owing to his illness. The then Ambassador KM Shihabuddin could not also attend the meeting. As a result, Joy represented Bangladesh.

Prior to that talks, said Bhuiyan, Joy spoke on behalf of Bangladesh during a meeting with US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia Affairs Karl Inderfurth on the same issue of GSP in presence of the state minister for foreign affairs.

Sadeq Hossain Khoka is the intending mayoral candidate of the BNP-led ruling alliance. Jahangir Mohammad Adel is of Ershad-led faction of Jatiya Party and Prof ATM Hemayet Uddin is of Islami Shantana Andolan.

According to officials at the Election Commission (EC), the other mayoral candidates are Kamru Hasan, ANM Mostaf Amin, Khaleque Islam Bakul, Afroza Hossain, Md Abdul Basit, Mamotaz Begum, Md Fazlul Haque, Mohammad Shamsad, Afzalul Haque Sikder, Mohammad Shahin, Krishok

Bahauddin Nasim

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Sahara Khatun, Syed Rezaur Rahman, Kamrul Islam, Mohammad Ali, Abdullah Abu, Monzazuddin Ahmed, Mehedi, Sababuddin Ahmed, Mosarrat Hossain Kajol, Abdur Rahman Hawlader and Khondaker Abdul Mannan stated that Nasim was arrested by CID from Zia International Airport at 11.30 pm on February 27 on charge of smuggling foreign currency. Later, he was taken on a 10-day remand in two separate cases, one relating to foreign currency smuggling case and the other filed with Madaripur thana on charge of firing gunshots on the motorcycle of the then opposition leader Khaleda Zia.

The investigation officer (IO) did not produce Nasim before the court on expiry of a five-day remand in the case filed with Airport thana although the magistrate directed the IO to produce the accused before the court on expiry of the remand, the defence lawyers argued.

The court directed the CID to interrogate the accused but the CID violated the court order. Nasim was kept in Dhaka Cantonment during the remand and was interrogated by JIC (Joint Interrogation Cell). In the criminal procedure code (CPC) there is no provision for interrogating the accused by the JIC. The

defence lawyers submitted a criminal appeal to the Judge's Court, seeking bail for Nasim on March 11 following rejection by the CPC's Court, Dhaka on March 6.

Nasim was arrested from ZIA on February 27 on charge of smuggling foreign currency.

Meanwhile, the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka will hear on remand petition in connection with the sedition case today.

The IO of the case on March 13 submitted a petition, seeking 10-day remand for interrogation in the sedition case.

26 mayor post runners

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Intending contestants and their supporters thronged the offices of returning officers (ROs) concerned and submitted nomination papers amid great enthusiasm on the last day yesterday.

In the capital, supporters were seen beating drums, singing, dancing and chanting slogans on the streets in favour of candidates of their choice, causing traffic congestion and miseries to thousands of people throughout the day.

Many were in colourful motorbikes and many more were on foot on way to Segunbagicha office of the RO, ignoring scorching heat on the day.

Khoka, the ruling alliance candidate virtually having no strong rival, seems to be set to win the polls race. He said he would not give any commitment to people which is difficult for him to implement. After filing nomination papers, the BNP leader was talking to newsmen about his development plans, if he is voted to the office of mayor.

Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas who was an aspirant for the post of DCC mayor, Nasiruddin Ahmed Pinto, BNP leader Abdus Salam, Ekhlas Mollahand several thousand of BNP activists accompanied Khoka when he went to submit three nomination papers.

Many people alleged that terrorists involved in city corporation's tender tempering were also seen accompanying ward commissioner candidates during the filing of nomination papers.

The highest 29 candidates filed nomination papers from ward-12 while one each from ward-21 and 51.

The lone candidate for ward commissioner was from ward-8 and the highest 11 from ward-10 of the wards reserved for women commissioners.

In Khulna, the mayoral candidates who filed nomination papers are incumbent Mayor Sheikh Tayebur Rahman of BNP, former Awami League leader Advocate Enayet Ali, Sirajul Islam of Muslim League and Advocate Firoze Ahmed of CPB and independents Badru Alam, Syed Tayeb Ali, Harunul Rashid and Mirza Appayan Habib, EC sources said.

Besides, 361 nomination papers were filed for 31 post of ward commissioner and 88 for 10 reserved seat for women commissioners.

In Rajshahi, the mayoral candidates who filed nomination papers include BNP leader and incumbent Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu, BNP city unit President Advocate Ekhlas Hossain, BNP district unit General Secretary Qamru Munir, Worker's Party leader Fazle Hossain Badsha and Jatiya Party leaders SM Borhanuzzaman Hira and Alhaj Solaiman Moudud.

The first meeting of the JBWG was held in New Delhi in April last year, which set the terms of reference (TOR) of the group. A three-day meet of the JBWG was held in Dhaka in early July, which saw the

Suicide bomber

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Washington to map out a ceasefire. That meeting aims to hammer out the last problems preventing a ceasefire declaration after a visit to the region by US Vice President Dick Cheney, who said he would meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat if he enforced a truce.

"Our people do not accept that any Palestinian should go and attack civilians inside Israel," the Palestinian leadership said in a statement.

Most of the passengers travelling in the bus were Israeli Arabs on their way to work, a spokesman for the bus operator, Egged, told state radio.

"The suicide bomber blew himself at the back of the bus, which was full and travelling from Tel Aviv to the town of Nazareth in the north of Israel," the spokesman said.

The attack took place in a sector close to the "Green Line" separating Israel from the West Bank.

It came just hours before a high-level security meeting scheduled between Israeli and Palestinian officials under the auspices of the US envoy, Anthony Zinni, will fail," Meckel said.

Matching with the performance, the letters of credit (LCs) opened for fabric imports during the last few months was consistently below the level of last fiscal's corresponding period. LC opening for capital machinery for the RMG sector has also plunged considerably, Mustafizur Rahman noted.

Other major export items like frozen food, leather, chemical products and raw jute are also set to face the battering. However, the Bangladesh Frozen Food Exporters Association, earning may dangerously dip this fiscal. "We are the worst victim of the ongoing recession. Besides, this sector is facing some other problems like inadequate supply of shrimp fry," said an exporter.

Leather export fetched \$116.86 million, posting a 30.26 per cent negative growth from the current fiscal's \$168 million target and also 10.86 per cent from last fiscal's corresponding period.

"The market is still bad. But we are hoping against hope that the situation would improve shortly," said MA Sattar Bhuiyan, president of the Bangladesh Leather, Leather goods, Footwear Exporters Association.

Textiles worth \$135.72 million

were exported against a target of \$160.42 million.

The earning is 15.40 per cent less than the target and also 3.19 per cent less than last fiscal's corresponding period.

During the July-January period, frozen food worth \$176.55 million were exported, which was 22.40 per cent short of the \$227.50 million target and also a massive 29.45 per cent less than last fiscal's corresponding period.

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