

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 Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Jalil, Abdur Razzak, 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.

Mentionably, 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 Uddayan.

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

They expressed their deep anguish at the "misuse" of Section 54.

"It appears that they (government) are pre-determined to frame sedition charges against our men," said Samad Azad.

Suranjit Sengupta said, "All political leaders are now terrified at the way the government is treating opposition leaders and a former minister. We're now seeking protection from the free press."

Tofail Ahmed said, by blaming the opposition for deterioration in law and order, the prime minister has provoked "cadres of ruling alliance" to do more repressive activities. The government is not allowing the opposition to exercise basic democratic rights.

Abdur Razzak referred to a recent statement of the Chief Justice to say that Section 54 was being grossly misused.

The AL leaders claimed that 777 people were killed and 8,554 injured in the country from October 10 last year to February 28 this year. Activists belonging to component parties of the alliance are responsible for the incidents, they alleged.

Terrorists belonging to BNP-Jamaat are also grabbing property, they alleged.

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 Pakistan 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.

Bahauddin Nasim

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Sahara Khatun, Syed Rezaur Rahman, Kamrul Islam, Mohammad Ali, Abdullah Abu, Momtazuddin Ahmed Mehedi, Sahabuddin Ahmed, Mosarraf 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 motorcade 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 (CrPC) there is no provision for interrogating the accused by the JIC. The

remand was expired on March 5 but the accused was not produced in the court on March 7, the lawyers said.

"Nasim was tortured during the remand period. He was not produced in the court as he was not in a position to move", the defence lawyers told the court.

After hearing from the defence side, the judge said, "If I find any allegation against the IO, I will direct the authorities concerned to take legal steps against him."

The prosecution side, opposed the petition for bail.

After hearing both sides, judge Ahmed Jamil Mostafa said he will pass an order on the issue today.

The defence lawyers submitted a criminal appeal to the Judge's Court, seeking bail for Nasim on March 11 following rejection by the CMM'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

FROM PAGE 1

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 motorcades and many more were on foot on way to Segunbagicha office of the RO, ignoring scorching heat on the day.

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 Shantantra Andolan.

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

Mohammad Sadeq, Zaved Reza, Mawlana Shamsul Haque Zihadee, Akkas Hossain, Hazi Iqbal, Abdul Latif, Amanullah Sikder, Mahbub Alam Chowdhury, Syed Noor, Begum Noorzahan, Motahar Hossain, Mostaf Allama and Karim Uddin Bharasha.

The EC will scrutinise the nomination papers today and prepare a draft list of candidates. It will make a final list after the last date of withdrawal of candidature, March 30.

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 MP, BNP leader Abdus Salam, Ekhlash Mollah and 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 Badrul Alam, Syed Tayeb Ali, Harunur 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 Ekhlash Hossain, BNP district unit General Secretary Qamrul Munir, Worker's Party leader Fazle Hossain Badsha and Jatiya Party leaders SM Borhanuzzaman Hira and Alhaj Solaiman Moudud.

Extortionists beat Korean engrs in N'gang

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanjanj

Two Korean engineers and two local supervisors engaged in the development work of the Dhaka-Sylhet highway were injured yesterday by extortionists allegedly belonging to the ruling BNP for refusing to pay toll.

The engineers were identified as Seyong Sam and Ching Jong Yong of the Korean Samwang Company engaged in the expansion work of the highway in the Barpa area under Rugganj thana. The injured Bangladeshi supervisors are Bellal and Abdur Rahim.

Sources said the extortionists went to the construction site at around 9pm on Wednesday and demanded a toll of Tk 1 lakh from the engineers and supervisors. When they refused to pay, the hoodlums beat them up, leaving them in a critical condition. The four were taken to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The construction work has since remained suspended.

Diamond-studded gold ornaments seized from jewellery in city

UNB, Dhaka

Police, BDR and the Customs Intelligence in a joint raid in New Amin Jewellers in the city's Gulshan area yesterday seized diamond-studded gold ornaments worth Tk 1,50,46,000.

A police-BDR team, tipped off by the Customs Intelligence, raided the shop at around 2 pm and seized the ornaments.

Sources said a case has been filed for possession of illegally imported ornaments.

The seized ornaments include 235 diamond-studded gold rings weighing 673.63 grams, six necklaces weighing 119.87 gram, 40 pairs of ear-rings weighing 173.30 grams, six bracelets weighing 16.93 grams, 27 pairs of bangles weighing 871.73 grams and 37 sets of necklaces and ear-rings weighing 1243.24 grams.

Hasina visits Satkhira today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Satkhira

Awami League president and leader of the opposition in parliament Sheikh Hasina arrives at Satkhira today.

She will address the leaders and workers of Satkhira district Awami League at Abdur Razzak Park at 5 pm.

Janatar Mancha

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came to power in October last year expressed his grievances to The Daily Star yesterday saying that he had lost his job although he was not actually involved in the Janatar Mancho.

But now, faced with the prospect of being charged with sedition, his life would be completely ruined, he said.

Similar fear has afflicted most of the 82 bureaucrats who have been given forced retirement and some 185 of the serving officials against whom the government has initiated departmental action for their involvement in the Janatar Mancho.

However, most of these serving officials have denied the government allegations, and most of the forcibly retired officials have already sought justice from the court claiming their jobs back.

Another such retired government official who was posted in Tangail in 1996 told The Daily Star yesterday that his forced retirement in December was perhaps given on the basis of a newspaper report that he said was untrue as far as his

involvement in an anti-government decision was concerned.

He said that on March 29, 1996 the particular newspaper reported that he had presided over a meeting of officials that concluded with a decision not to cooperate with the government.

"But the truth is that we did not take such a decision as was reported correctly by other newspapers. I have even filed a case against that particular paper for wrong reporting. The case is undertrial," he added.

Sources said at least 50 of the 82 officials who have been given forced retirement were unofficially accused of being involved in the Janatar Moncho, such allegations being made on the basis of contemporary newspaper reports. However, the government decision-makers did not bother to check the authenticity of the reports neither did they seek the version of the accused officials, said the sources.

Dates for border talks

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lifting and drug trafficking.

Bangladesh side is expected to object to any proposal for border fencing or tree plantation on zero line, which the Indian side is likely to suggest. Tree plantation will only increase trade in narcotics, officials in Dhaka feel. Besides, the possible proposal goes against the border demarcation guidelines agreed between the two countries in 1975.

The JBWG meeting

The meeting of the Joint Boundary Working Group (JBWG) is now due to be held in New Delhi on March 26 and 27. Joint Secretary (Political) of the Ministry of Home Affairs Mir Shahabuddin is likely to lead the Bangladesh team at the talks in India.

The JBWG will discuss several unresolved issues in the Mujib-India agreement of 1974. The contentious issues include demarcation of the 6.5 kilometres stretch between the two countries, exchange of enclaves, adverse possessions and construction of border pillars.

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

signing of agreed minutes.

At the Dhaka meeting, the JBWG was divided into two components -- JBWG-1 and JBWG-2 -- to provide greater opportunity to address different border issues.

Incidentally, the tenure of the JBWG is due to end in April when it is due to submit its recommendations to foreign secretaries of the two countries.

Jamuna Builders

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reputation of Jamuna Builders by publishing a legal notice in some newspapers on March 15, 16 and 17, seeking payment of Tk 31.53 lakh.

In the notice, Holcim mentioned that they would file a civil suit with Deolia court (bankruptcy court) for declaring the Jamuna Builders insolvent, if it (Jamuna) does not pay Tk 31.53 lakh within 90 days, Khondaker Yunus Ali, Senior Administrative Officer of Jamuna complained in the case.

After hearing, Magistrate Emdadul Haq took the case into cognisance and directed the officer-in-charge (OC) of Gulshan thana to take legal action against the accused after investigation.

2-yr-old girl burnt alive in city

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A two-year-old girl died in a fire at a shanty on Panthapath in the city's Dhanmondi area yesterday afternoon.

The victim was identified as Nahima, daughter of Alam. Another two-year-old girl also received burn injuries in the incident.

Sources said the fire originated from an oven inside the thatched house of Alam at about 1:50pm yesterday, also engulfing another thatched house nearby owned by Jainal.

Families of both the deceased and the injured girls lived as caretakers at the 44/26, North Dhanmondi plot.

Two fire-fighting units from Mohammadpur and the fire headquarters rushed to the spot and doused the fire after an hour-long struggle.

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.

Grab spade

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Corporation (DCC) for proper disposal of garbage and waste in the capital.

The prime minister also called upon the city dwellers to dump garbage at a certain place at a fixed time. She hoped that all would keep their respective houses clean and help keep public places including markets and bazars clean.

She noted that the ministries concerned, city corporations, municipalities and district authorities must play a more proactive role in maintaining cleanliness.

As part of the cleanliness drive, the prime minister later handed over to the relevant authorities 23 garbage carrying vehicles for different municipalities.

The drive began simultaneously in all divisions, districts and upazilas of the country to create public awareness and to encourage them to keep their respective houses and areas clean.

The inaugural function was presided over by Maj (ret'd) Abdul Mannan, MP from Karwan Bazar area, and addressed by LGRD and Cooperatives Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Minister for Public Works and and Housing Mirza Abbas, DCC Mayor Mohamam Hanif, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ziaul Huq Zia, Deputy Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Ruhul Quddus Talukder and Secretary of Local Government Division AYBI Siddiqui.

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.

Suicide bomber

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Jihad, told AFP the bomber was Rafad Abu Diak, 20, from the village of Silat al-Dhar, between Nablus and Jenin in the northern West Bank.

The Palestinian Authority condemned the incident and said all attacks on civilians inside Israel must stop.

"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 up 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 CIA and Anthony Zinni, a retired Marine Corps general sent by

No turnaround in sight

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Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) told The Daily Star.

January was however a fickle hope, but only a hope as there is no reason to expect any dramatic turnaround. And wait till July for anything positive to happen, he added.

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's. 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 Knitwear Manufacturers Exporters Association (BKMEA) said knitwear export may not face a negative growth although this fiscal's \$1700 million target will always remain a

target. Knitwear worth \$836.64 million was exported till January, marking a 15.69 per cent shortfall from this fiscal's target, and also 3.48 per cent less than last fiscal's same period.

"Exports picked up from January and the tempo still continues. Prices are down, but so what? Volume has increased substantially. We hope final figures will be at par with last fiscal's \$1496.23 million," said Monjurul Hoque, president of the BKMEA.

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

According to 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.

Jute goods 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 of FY02, chemical products worth \$37.22 million were exported against the \$64.17 million target.

During the period, raw jute worth \$30.25 million was exported against the target of \$40.83 million, which also is a massive 25.91 per cent shortfall and shows a 18.57 per cent decline from last fiscal's same time.

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.