

Unite against govt misrule: Hasina

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Main opposition Awami League (AL) President Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated her call to the pro-liberation forces to unite against the 'misrule and misdeeds' of the government and launch a movement to topple it.

"Life under the four-party alliance rule has become miserable because of widespread corruption," she said at a rally organised by the city unit of the AL at Mirpur.

Hasina said, "Though the present rulers came to power pledging to root out violence, they are now the main sponsors of countrywide criminal activities." She blamed Prime Minister Khaleda Zia for patronising killers.

Hasina alleged that the government has prepared a hitlist of the opposition leaders including herself. "I am ready to face any consequence for protesting the misrule of the present government," Hasina said.

She observed that the government was executing its plan of targeting the opposition forces, particularly the AL.

The alliance government is responsible for a battered public life, she said referring to the price hike of essentials.

Hasina blamed the ruling coalition men for attacking lawyers on

the premises of the Dhaka district court and said the government is destroying the judicial system like other sectors.

The opposition leader was critical of the Jamaat-e-Islami ministers in the cabinet and said a Jamaat minister, who had destroyed the country's agriculture sector, now heads the industries ministry.

The former prime minister said all the development works that were initiated during the previous AL rule have been halted. "The present government has not initiated any new development project," she added.

Presided over by Kamal Ahmed Majumder, the rally was addressed by AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Joint Secretary Obaidul Kader, City AL President Mohammad Hanif and its General Secretary Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya.

Hundreds of leaders and supporters of the AL and its front organisations of Mirpur, Pallabi and Kafur thana units joined the rally chanting slogans against the government and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

Prior to joining the programme, Hasina visited the residence of Samad Khan, a Jubo League leader, who was killed on August 11.

Officials hope to form Gram Sarkar units by deadline

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Over 80 per cent of the 40,392 Gram Sarkar units have been formed so far amid political opposition and a writ challenging legality of the Gram Sarkar Act 2003 pending with the court.

With the formation of 230 units in 18 districts yesterday, the number of units of the local government body, which will serve as an auxiliary to the Union Parishad, now stands at around 33,000.

Officials are optimistic about completing formation of all units ahead of the September 17 deadline. The process to form a Gram Sarkar unit in each of the 40,392 wards under 4,488 Union Parishads (UPs) began on August 2 with a 45-day time limit as stipulated by the Gram Sarkar Act 2003.

The elected UP member from each ward will head each unit while a female elected UP member will be advisor to three units. The 15-member Gram Sarkar unit will have a five-year tenure.

Each unit will have a Gram Sarkar *Proadhan* (chief) and an advisor, while the remaining 13 members will be drawn from representatives of women, farmers, VDP men, general labourers, farm labourers, freedom fighters, teachers and businessmen.

The Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development (LGRD) and Cooperatives will impart training to all members regarding their job description and local development activities.

The Gram Sarkar units will supervise sanitation and tree plantation, and allocate VGF (Vulnerable Group Feeding) cards and allowances for elderly people among other things, sources said.

Meanwhile, the date for hearing the writ petition filed by eminent lawyer Dr Kamal Hossain on behalf of the Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) challenging the legality of the Gram Sarkar Act 2003 has not been fixed yet.

Also, according to press reports, a large number of the Gram Sarkar units were allegedly formed with less than the required numbers of voters, without democratic process and amid clashes over selection of members.

Cargo vessel sinks near Sandwip

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A cargo vessel carrying reportedly Tk 1 crore worth of steel coils sank yesterday near Sandwip channel.

Sealiner Sonar Kiran, with 1,100 tonnes of cargo, plunged into the sea some one and half kilometres off Chittagong Ports outer anchorage as stormy wind caught it. However, all 17 crew on board were rescued, sources said.

The liner, dipped at around 7:55am, was on its way to Pagla in Narayanganj, sources added. MT Zohra, a private tanker, saved six crew of the vessel and the rest swam to Sandwip shore, sources said.

CPD to hold symposium in Cancun

BSS, Dhaka

The Dhaka-based Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) will hold a symposium on marginalisation of LDCs in Cancun on September 12.

The CPD is organising the symposium during the five-day fifth ministerial meeting of the WTO beginning September 10 in collaboration with the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), Geneva, a CPD release said yesterday.

The symposium will focus on topics like market access, special and differential treatment and trade related technical assistance.

It will also highlight the trade interests and concerns of LDCs in the context of the evolving WTO regime, mobilising broad-based support to LDCs during the negotiations, consolidating LDC solidarity on common issues and sharing thoughts about plan of action after the Cancun meet, the release said.

Experts, civil society leaders and opinion makers from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe will present papers in the symposium.

Commerce Minister and Vice Chairman of the Cancun meet Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury is expected to attend it.

6 robbers held with arms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six including a woman were arrested as alleged robbers with three firearms and 12 bullets at West Jatrabari in Demra yesterday.

Eba, Hakim, Jahangir, Monir, Zakir and Aleya were held from a house. They used to shift from one house to another to avoid arrest, police said.

Gold ornaments, cash and other valuables were also seized from their possession.

A case was filed with Demra Police Station.



PHOTO: STAR

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia opens the new annex building at the District Judge's Court in Old Dhaka yesterday.

Palestinian PM quits

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and now has two weeks to name a new prime minister, said a senior Palestinian official who spoke on condition of anonymity. In the meantime, Abbas' Cabinet will remain in place as a caretaker government.

Abbas' departure after only four months in office meant even greater uncertainty for the "road map" peace plan, already in serious trouble because of a major spike in violence in recent weeks and the collapse of a unilateral truce by militants.

"Israel is monitoring the developments, and says it will not accept a state of affairs in which control over the Palestinian Authority reverts back to Yasser Arafat or one of his loyalists," said a statement from the office of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon.

Abbas' departure was expected to further hurt Arafat's international standing if he is seen as having engineered the prime minister's departure.

It could also lower the threshold for possible Israeli action against Arafat: Israel's defence minister has raised the possibility of sending Arafat into exile.

Israeli Cabinet Minister Danny Naveh on Saturday called for Arafat's ouster, Israel Army Radio said. Other government officials withheld comment Saturday, and Israel's position on the matter remained unclear.

Abbas, who might have been ousted anyhow in a confidence vote in parliament next week, had his resignation letter delivered to Arafat by two senior officials Saturday before addressing the legislature in a closed-door session to explain his decision.

Palestinian officials said they feared the resignation would lead the region into further chaos. "We are entering a new crisis and the price of this crisis will be the shedding of a lot of blood," said Kadourah Fares, a legislator from the ruling Fatah movement.

Abbas had been frustrated by the constant wrangling with Arafat, his aides said. He was also hurt by the near-collapse of the road map and his inability to improve the daily lives of Palestinians.

On Thursday, when Abbas addressed legislators, he was heckled and shoved by an angry crowd of Arafat supporters, including several armed and masked men.

Even if he hadn't resigned, Abbas might have been forced out. He faced a vote of confidence in parliament in the coming days, and there was growing dissatisfaction in parliament with his performance and his difficulties with Arafat.

Abbas' resignation could also end up being a blow to Arafat, even if at first it appeared the veteran leader had outmaneuvered his politically inexperienced prime minister.

Israel's defence minister, Shaul Mofaz, said earlier this week that Israel might have to expel Arafat before the end of the year, if Arafat keeps getting into the way of peace efforts.

Israeli analysts have said Abbas' departure was one scenario in which Israel might decide to act.

Until now, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has held back on expulsion, both because of U.S. opposition and because of warnings from his security advisers that sending Arafat abroad would do more harm than keeping him relatively isolated at his West Bank headquarters.

Abbas and Arafat have been at odds ever since Arafat appointed the prime minister under intense international pressure in April. The latest standoff was over control of the security forces. Abbas, backed by the United States, demanded command over all men under arms, but Arafat refused to relinquish control over four of the eight security branches.

Abbas had said he would not clamp down on militants as required by the U.S.-backed "road map" peace plan. However, being in control of all the security forces would have given him greater authority in renewed negotiations with Hamas, Islamic Jihad and renegades from his own Fatah movement.

Earlier this week, Abbas told parliament it must either back him or strip him of his post, saying he was not clinging to the job and would just as soon step down.

PM: Legal stagnation

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law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry's 'Legal and Judicial Capacity Building Project' assisted by the World Bank.

Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Moudud Ahmed, State Minister Mohammad Shahjahan Omar, Acting Chief Justice M Ruhul Amin, World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh Christine I Wallich and Law Secretary M Asaduzzaman also spoke at the function.

The prime minister said the judiciary is now entangled in numerous problems for lack of necessary reforms.

She reminded the judges that honesty, courage, wisdom, ability to deliver sharp judgement and firmness in establishing truth and justice have placed them in a dignified position in society.

US willing to help improve law and order

UNB, Dhaka

US Ambassador to Bangladesh Harry K Thomas has said America is closely working with Bangladesh government to figure out ways to improve the law and order, a serious problem facing the people.

"We're already closely working with the home minister to find programme, training programmes. The home minister is very dedicated to this. We'll work this out," he told some reporters after attending a function at the Press Institute of Bangladesh (PIB) yesterday.

Asked if he resets his priorities in Bangladesh after having talks with the prime minister and the leader of the opposition, Thomas said his priorities remain the same - to help sustain democracy, diversify economy and improve bilateral trade.

"Bangladesh does not have problems, it has challenges, opportunities to succeed," he said, expressing the optimism that "Bangladesh will find ways to succeed."

He noted that the law and order and Bangladesh's economy could be improved through many training programmes the US government has now been offering.

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Pointing out that a very small section is involved in crime, Khaleda Zia urged the judges to make sure that justice is administered in the quickest possible time in the greater interest of society. "People feel helpless when cases linger on," she said.

She also laid importance on reducing the expenditure involved in cases to make the legal system affordable for the poor. In this context, she mentioned her government's different programmes, including the alternative system of case disposal through amendment to the civil procedure.

The prime minister also referred to the formation of a high-powered committee at the Ministry of Home Affairs to assist in speedy disposal of sensational cases.

Rivers swell

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Narayanganj

Out of 85 monitoring stations of the country, the FFWC recorded rise at 26 points, fall at 39 points and steady at two points, while three points were flowing above the danger levels during the last 24 hours, ending at 6:00am today.

The Brahmaputra-Jamuna saw rise at Noonkhawa, Chilmari, Bahadurabad, Sirajganj and Aricha, the Dharla at Kurigram, and the Teesta at Dalia and Kaunia.

The Old Brahmaputra recorded rise in Jamalpur and Mymensingh. The Balu at Demra and the Lakhya at Narayanganj receded but they are still above danger levels.

The Padma registered a fresh rise at Pankha, Rajshahi and Hardinge Bridge points. The river is still flowing above danger level at Pankha. The Mohananda at Chapainabab-ganj registered further rise.

River Surma registered rise at Kanaighat and Sylhet, the Kushiara at Sheola, the Manu at Manu Railway Bridge point and Moulvi Bazar, and the Khowai at Ballah.

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AL leader slain

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offices were cordoned off by police.

Most of the injured are supporters of the AL, Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo league who attended the meeting at the party office held yesterday evening.

So far no one has claimed responsibility for the attack and no arrests have been made.

On Thursday, another local leader of the party was killed after unidentified assailants hurled bombs while he was riding a rickshaw.

Khulna city has been tense since the August 25 killing of a senior Awami League leader.

Manujrul Imam, president of Awami League's Khulna city chapter and a member of the party's central advisory council, was gunned down, while another lawyer and the rickshaw-puller ferrying him were also killed in that attack.

Meanwhile, a policeman and two others were injured when a police van came under bomb attack at Boyra Bazar under Sonadanga Police Station at 8:00 Friday night.

Violence rocks court

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closed all the doors of the association building during the attack leaving no room for the lawyers to escape.

After about 15 minutes of indiscriminate beatings, they left the scene leaving a trail of blood and destruction in the association building.

They closed all the rooms from outside while leaving, trapping the injured in the building unattended.

Soon after the attack, Khaleda went to the court and laid foundations of the annex building of the judge's court.

As the premier left the court at 1:15pm, over 200 BNP-backed lawyers barged into the association office with the help of police who opened the closed doors for them.

Some of the belligerent lawyers pulled down the portrait of the Bangabandhu on the ground floor and shredded it into pieces.

They burst into the rooms of association president and general secretary, broke Bangabandhu's portraits there and smashed furniture and office equipment.

The pro-government lawyers assaulted two court correspondents -- Emdadul Haq Lal of the Ajker Kagoj and Abdul Haq Bhuiyan of the Manabzamin -- who were covering the events.

Hundreds of general lawyers, shocked at the height of the violence, scrambled for cover, triggering a stampede that injured 25.

The rampaging lawyers also assaulted photojournalist M Hasan and Staff Correspondent Russell Akhter of the Bhorer Kagoj. Photojournalist Subir Kumar Das of the Ajker Kagoj, Shafiqul Alam and Indrajit of The News Today, Firoj Chowdhury of the Prothom Alo, Mahbub Hossain Nabin of the Jugantar, S K Nandi of The Bangladesh Observer and Shafiqul Islam of The Bangladesh Today.

The attackers also took away their films and camera lens. Court correspondents on the scene rushed to the rescue of the lensmen and saved them from further beatings.

Some injured lawyers were admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital and some others to the National Medical College Hospital.

Dhaka Bar Association condemned the attack and demanded immediate and exemplary punishment to the attackers.

In a statement, Mohammad Israfil and Mukhlesur Rahman Badal held the Jubo Dal and the Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal, the student front of the BNP, responsible for the attack.

The victim's wife also filed a case against the attackers, police said.

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The injured are van driver constable Raihan, 32, and pedestrians Swapan, 34, and Arif, 13. They were admitted to Khulna Medical College Hospital.

According to police, the bomb attack took place when two wanted criminals -- Ali Hossain and Amjad -- were being brought to Sonadanga Police Station.

Witnesses said the bomb was hurled at the police van by Shathi, daughter of Amjad, to snatch her father from police custody. Later, police arrested Shathi. A case was filed with Sonadanga Police Station yesterday against Amjad and Shathi under the Explosives Act.

In another incident, a police van came under armed attack by activists of the outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) at Bhabanipur village in Rupsha upazila Friday midnight. The incident occurred when police were carrying out an anti-crime drive.

According to police, the outlaws fired shots at the police van. None was injured in the shootout, police sources said.

ble for the attack.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh Hasina said the BNP-Jamaat alliance must bear responsibility for the 'barbaric' attack on lawyers.

In a statement, Hasina denounced the attack, saying the lawyers came under attack at a time when they stood by helpless people and launched a movement to establish the rule of law, democracy, independence of judiciary and human rights.

"The whole nation is stunned as armed outsiders raided Dhaka Bar Bhaban and swooped on the lawyers. No lawyer could escape the brutality of the BNP-Jamaat terrorists," she said.

Demanding immediate arrest of the attackers, she urged people from all walks of life, irrespective of party and opinion, to wage a vigorous movement against 'the anti-people and barbaric regime.'

The Court Reporters Association and Crime Reporters Association also condemned attack on journalists on duty.

Meanwhile, Jatyatabadi Ainjibi Forum blamed the pro-AL lawyers for the attack.

Timber trader chopped at Kazipara

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A furniture trader and his men yesterday allegedly chopped a timber trader of Kazipara following business rivalry.

Zakir Hossain, 35, the timber trader, is now undergoing treatment at the orthopaedic hospital with wounds in his back, hands and legs.