

AL MPs defy

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Sircar dismissed the demand for resignation of the BNP-led coalition and snap polls and called on the opposition to join parliament to talk about other four issues.

"The demand for midterm elections is illogical," he said.

Sircar cited a provision in the constitution that an elected government will hold power for a five-year term. "Let the government work for five years. If it fails to run the country, people will vote it out in the next elections and the opposition will come to power," he said.

Four other demands are withdrawal of the 14th constitution amendment bill and an end to "one-sided" alterations to the constitution, peaceful rallies and the right to movement, a stop to police repression and release of political prisoners and steps to implement AL's previous 15-point-demand.

"Raise these issues in parliament and I will allow you enough time to speak," Sircar assured the AL legislators.

The memorandum described the proposed 14th amendment as contrary to the spirit of the constitution. Despite strong opposition from the AL and other political parties, the bill will be passed in the current session of the Jatiya Sangsad that resumed yesterday.

Over 30 lawmakers from the AL Parliamentary Party (ALPP) and a group of journalists flocked to the speaker's chamber during the handover of the memorandum.

AL leader Abdus Samad Azad told Sircar at a 30-minute meeting: "We are not satisfied with what you said. We are not here to take your advice but to submit our memorandum." Azad's angry word came after Sircar insisted on opposition delegates joining parliament.

"Be the speaker of people. We will be with you," Azad told Sircar, asking him to take AL demands seriously.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil at the meeting condemned the recent attack on AL lawmaker Mirza Azam and police raids on other AL leaders. He also protested the arrests of more than 13,000 people including their workers and high-profile police attacks on peaceful AL programmes.

Sonargaon UP polls marred by false voting

OUR CORRESPONDENT, N'ganj

On the withdrawal of the constitution amendment bill, Sircar said: "It is up to the government and opposition to debate the withdrawal or passage of the bill."

He asked the opposition lawmakers to join parliamentary debates and specify the violations of the right to rallies and free movement.

Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid, AL presidium member Sheikh Selim and Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid accused ruling coalition lawmakers of verbal abuse in parliament.

The ALPP in the memorandum criticised a proposal for extending the retirement age of judges, saying it serves the narrow political interest of assigning an individual as the head of the caretaker government.

BARBED WIRE
Riot police obstructed AL leaders with barbed-wire fences when they gathered on Dhamondi Road No. 27 to march towards parliament.

In an argument with the police, the ALPP members described the roadblock as a violation of their right to free movement.

Police let the AL leaders out after much insistence and escorted them to the south entry to the parliament complex amid opposition leaders' antigovernment slogans.

NO-CONFIDENCE

On the second day of the "mass no-confidence programme", AL leaders staged sit-ins at Zero Point and on Dhamondi Road No. 27 ringed by police. The law enforcers did not allow any mid-level party workers to join the programme.

Police cordoned the AL central office on Bangabandhu Avenue. Arsonists with apparent ties to the AL set fire to a Volvo bus in Motijheel, but no passenger was hurt.

The Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) of Hasanul Haq Inu observed the second day of its simultaneous "mass no-confidence programme" with a sit-in in front of the General Post Office.

The JSD alleged in a press release that police picked up five of their workers.

Both the AL and JSD will simultaneously observe the third and final day of the "mass no-confidence programme" today.

Strike at 8 state-owned jute mills observed

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Production was suspended at eight state-owned jute mills in Khulna-Jessore industrial belt yesterday as workers went on a 24-hour strike to press home an 11-point demand.

The demands include 10 percent dearness allowance, re-opening of the closed mills and factories, payment of arrears of the retrenched workers and of insurance claims.

Thousands of workers brought out a procession in Khalishpur in support of the strike that began at 6:00 in the morning. Police were deployed at all the mills.

Huda

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scam", saying the vehicles were sold at very high prices.

"Each CNG-run auto-rickshaw was sold at Tk 3,500 lakh against the real price of Tk 1.5 lakh. People appreciated the step to free Dhaka City from air pollution, but the scam tarnished the government's image," he said.

The communications minister then tried to defend his position, saying when the vehicles were imported he was not at home.

The state minister for communications oversaw the process, he added.

At this moment, the young lawmakers interrupted Huda, creating noise, meeting sources said.

The parliamentary standing committee on the communications ministry had earlier raised allegations of corruption against the minister in the import and distribution of the auto-rickshaw.

The committee said the minister gave permission to only one company to import the vehicles and formed a sub-committee to probe the allegations.

The sub-committee is investigating the allegations.

SB directs

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others, with sections for the total number of arrests.

The circular instructed police to report to the SB Control Room in every 12 hours at 7:00 in the morning and evening, mentioning the people arrested or temporarily detained and the number of arrests made at bus and train stations.

The same instructions had earlier been given over telephone, police sources said.

Siamese twins

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Maria's circulation became very weak and she remains connected to a ventilator," said Dr Amin who also performed a similar operation in June last year.

Maria has a 50 percent chance of survival while doctors are very hopeful about Halima who continues to do well without any life support.

Father of the babies, Shahed Ali, was present outside the operating theatre yesterday while the mother, Papiya Khatun Shefali, was at her village home of Pabna's Bolarampur.

The first such separation was performed in 2001 at Dhaka Shishu Hospital by Prof AFM Masud, but the twins, both males, died 17 hours after separation.

Dr Ruhul Amin performed the second operation on a pair of male twins in June last year and one of them survived.

Our Pabna correspondent reports thousands of people in Bolarampur yesterday organised a special prayer (Dua Mahfil) at local mosques prior to the operation on the Siamese twins and people rejoiced after hearing about the successful operation.

Run by the Islamic Bank Foundation, the IBH bore all costs of the operation including pre- and post-operative expenses of up to Tk 10 lakh.

Other members of the team of surgeons were Dr Shahadat Hossain, Dr Darul Islam, Dr Mostaq Ahmed, Dr Zahid Hossain and Dr MPH Siddique.

caused disease in animals and in humans through contact with infectious animals. It is currently believed that certain species of fruit bats are the natural hosts of it.

Though the exact mode of transmission from animal to animal or from animal to human is uncertain, it appears to require close contact with contaminated tissue or body fluids from infected animals.

Nipah antibodies have been detected in pigs and some other domestic and wild animals. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), the role of species other than pigs in transmitting the infection to other animals has not yet been determined.

The incubation period for the virus is between four and 18 days. In many cases, the infection is mild or non-apparent (sub-clinical). In symptomatic cases, the onset usually comes with 'influenza-like' symptoms, with high fever and muscle aches.

"We hope, when Health Canada is here, we will be able to do more close investigations much more quickly," said Prof Azad.

As of April 20, preliminary reports of one cluster of 30 cases, including 18 deaths, attributed to Nipah virus infection in Faridpur district has been received.

The laboratory testing, done by the CDC, has confirmed Nipah virus infection in 16 of the cases.

Nipah virus is a newly recognised zoonotic virus, that is, a virus that animals pass to humans. The virus was 'discovered' in 1999. It has

Final probe

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The DG, when contacted last night, declined to comment on the report.

He was accused of three corruption charges and found guilty on two counts. He however was cleared of another charge for causing a loss of Tk 16.73 lakh to the national exchequer through tender manipulation and irregularities in the purchase of film raw materials as the charge was not proved beyond doubt.

Additional Secretary of the Ministry of Agriculture Mohammad Abdul Aziz conducted the final investigation on the basis of another inquiry committee report and evidences of the witnesses.

Earlier, the information ministry formed a four-member inquiry committee headed by a joint secretary, which proved massive corruption and gross irregularities against the DG.

The previous inquiry committee found the DG had drawn over Tk 18 lakh in bills against four documentaries and three video films without making those, purchased raw materials at a cost of Tk 16.73 lakh through tender manipulation and made documentaries and video films without the ministry's permission.

After approval of the prime minister and the president, the information ministry asked the establishment ministry to appoint an inquiry officer above the status of a

joint secretary for the final inquiry into the charges against the DG.

The establishment ministry then appointed the additional secretary of the agriculture ministry as the inquiry officer, who completed probe on April 15.

According to the final report, the DFP DG made six documentaries and one video film in 2001-2002 and five documentaries and as many video films without obtaining permission from the ministry.

The report also found the DG misappropriated Tk 18,09,500 through submitting fake bills without making four documentaries and three video films. It found that four documentaries, Jibon Jemon Jebhabey, Tourism, Gonotuner Uttran and Festival of Bangladesh, and three video films -- Esho Sundor Pathey, Shishu Apaharan Rodin and Tomar Moto Bondhu Ke Achhey, were not made at all.

Mamunur Rashid Chowdhury, joint secretary (Development) of the information ministry, placed the case during the final inquiry while Deputy Secretary of the ministry Tajul Islam and Film Librarian of DFP Reenat Sultana were the witnesses in the case.

The DG did not appear before the inquiry officer despite being served with two separate notices, prompting the completion of the inquiry on the basis of evidences and statements of the witnesses.

Cloud overshadows

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In an oblique reference to strikes in western countries, he said political parties never enforce general strike and it does not affect general people too.

In those countries, there are incidences of strikes that they solve through discussion among employees and employers, the envoy said, apparently indicating the difference between the hartal here and the strike over there.

"It's the business community to change the decision," Michel told a questioner, who asked the envoy if they could use their offices to change the tradition of the political programme like hartal.

Foreign Investors' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FCCI) President Mahbub Jamil said trade-body members indeed made appeals to the two leaders (Khaleda and Hasina) several times but only in vain.

"We cannot enforce hartal against hartal," he said, with a tinge of frustration.

Michel said only a few big companies came here with investment while others shied away simply because of the country's 'image crisis' abroad.

He suggested improving the image through projecting the success cases.

On anti-investment factors like poor law and order and corruption, the

French diplomat, emerging out of the meeting, told newsmen, "I don't think these are major problems. Image is the concern."

He was also concerned at the country's dependence on a single export item, apparel. He called for diversification of the export products as a preparation for facing quota-free trade regime from next year.

He, however, sang praises of the manufacturers who displayed diversified products at the Bangladesh trade fair in Paris recently where half the 29 participants had showcased products other than RMG.

The FICCI president said Bangladesh enjoys a good trade surplus as Dhaka exports goods worth \$400 million against its \$125 million imports.

Exports include readymade garments, frozen shrimps and ceramic tableware. And exports from France are restricted to a few items like wheat, gas turbines, telecom equipment and chemicals.

French investment in Bangladesh would be around \$250 million, of which around \$240 million could be attributed to a single venture, Lafarge Cement.

"There is scope for further French investment in this country and expansion of bilateral trade and product diversification at both ends," said the FICCI president.

Mass arrests needed

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the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"The government has taken the measure on the basis of specific information and documents that a conspiracy is going on against the government," Khaleda, also leader of the parliamentary party, said.

"Nobody has been mindlessly harassed," meeting sources quoted her as saying.

She warned the 'troublemakers', saying: "Nobody, including the activists of the ruling and opposition parties, will be spared for maintaining the constitutional process."

Police have arrested over 10,000 people, including activists of the main opposition Awami League (AL) and innocent people, since April 19 in an apparent attempt to foil the oust-government agitation.

Police have arrested over

BNP Standing Committee Member KM Obaidur Rahman opposed the provision for reserved seats in parliament, terming it as unnecessary.

He, however, proposed introduction of quotas for political parties for proportionate nomination of women candidates in general elections.

BNP lawmaker Abdul Mannan also opposed the provision, but called for introduction of 64 reserved seats for women with the provision for direct election.

Taking part in the discussion,

Health Minister and BNP Standing Committee Member Dr Khandaker Moshtarak Hossain defended the proposed provision for women seats.

Some lawmakers proposed for demarcation of reserved constituencies and some opposed proportionate distribution of the seats among parties with representation in parliament.

At the press briefing, the chief whip said direct election to reserved seats was not realistic.

"If the direct election system is introduced, the women candidates will have to face difficulties."

On the AL's April 30 deadline for requesting the government, he said the meeting did not discuss the issue in detail.

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At the meeting BNP lawmakers demanded improvement in law and order, an end to price hike of essentials and downsizing of the cabinet, but appeared divided on the reserved seats for women in parliament.

Briefing reporters, Chief Whip

Khandaker Moshtarak Hossain

said 152 attended the meeting that was adjourned again.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed

explained different provisions of

the proposed bill for amendment to the constitution. He also hinted at the passage of the bill in the current session of parliament.

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