

Reform caretaker system, EC: Jalil

AL won't join polls if demands not met, Magura council told

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Magura

Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil yesterday reiterated his party's stance that it will not participate in the next general election unless the caretaker system is reformed and the Election Commission (EC) reorganised to hold a free and fair election.

"We will soon make specific proposals to the government for necessary reforms", he said while addressing the triennial council of Magura district AL, held at Asaduzzaman Auditorium in the town.

The AL leader said, the previous elections suggested that a fair election is not possible under a caretaker government headed by a person who is partisan. This prompted us to think differently, he said.

He also demanded an Election Commission with a separate secretary, its own budget and free from

influence of the executive.

Jalil also criticised Prime Minister's recent comments at public meetings that AL is trying to foil the next election. "We want a fair election, not like polls held on February 15, 1996 and on October, 2001."

The AL general secretary said BNP-Jamaat government has divided the people of the country into two classes, leaving most of them deprived of their minimum rights while giving opportunities to a selected few for earning money and resources.

Jalil criticised the government for failing to control prices of essentials. "We will not allow them to play with the fate of the people."

"This autocratic regime must be removed for restoration of democracy and values of the Liberation War".

He said, people's life is now 'endangered' due to rise of 'ultra fanatic forces' under patronisation of the government.

He called upon AL leaders and activists and the people to stand united to pull down the alliance government through a mass movement and free the country from their 'misrule'.

"The time of this government is running out fast. This government will not be allowed to exploit the people and the nation any more", he told the council.

With district AL Convener Md Altfaz Hossain in the chair, the council was addressed by, among others, central AL Organising Secretary Abdul Mannan, former minister Talukder Abdul Khaleq MP, general secretary of central Sramik League Roy Ramesh Chandra, local lawmaker Prof Dr MS Akbar, central AL Assistant Secretary SM Kamal Hossain and central AL leader Abdul Majid.

Dislodge this govt

Motia tells party men at Syedpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Awami League Presidium member and former agriculture minister Motia Chowdhury has said the people have nothing to get from the government as it has turned autocratic and wants to cling to power anyhow.

She called upon AL leaders and workers to build a mass movement to pull down the alliance government to dislodge the government.

"It (government) wants to perpetuate power through a stage-managed polls", she said while addressing a triennial conference of Saidpur upazila Awami League on Sunday.

The immediate past chief justice who is likely to head the next caretaker government is known to be a man of ruling BNP's choice and any election under him will not be free and fair, she claimed.

Presided over by Syedpur AL convener Abbasuddin Sarker, the council was addressed by, among others, AL central organising secretary Abdul Mannan, central leader Mosharrif Hossen, district AL joint convener Jonab Ali, party leader Col (Rtd) Saqlain and municipal chairman Akhtar Hossen Badal, also an AL leader.

The front ranking AL leader said her party, along with other parties and progressive forces will intensify its agitation for reform of the caretaker system.

She came down heavily on the government for what she called its "false claims" of better management of the economy, improvement in law and order and luring foreign investment.

"How the economy has improved while so many mills and factories have been closed down and prices of essentials are spiraling? Coarse rice is being sold at between Tk 17 and 19 now against Tk 14-15 during AL rule but people's income has not increased, she said.

She refuted government's claim on different occasions that foreign investment flow increased during its tenure because of improvement in law and order.



PHOTO: STAR

A pucca godown razed to the ground at Tupamari village in Nilphamari Sadar upazila by Sunday's nor'wester.

Dinajpur Medical College students' 5-pt demand

A CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Students of Dinajpur Medical College (DMC) yesterday staged a demonstration in front of the principal's office to press their 5-point demand.

Earlier on Monday, several hundred students submitted a memorandum to the Health Ministry through the Deputy Commissioner containing the demands.

The demands include modernization of DMC, construction of new dormitories and a Shaheed Minar on its campus, recruitment of adequate number of teachers, stock of required books in library and transport facility for students residing outside the campus.

Addressing in a press conference later on the day, the students said they will launch a tougher agitation if steps are not taken in eight days to meet the demands.

Nor'wester lashes 3 upazilas

40 injured; houses, crops damaged in Nilphamari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

A nor'wester lashed Dimla, Kishoreganj and Sadar upazila areas in the district Sunday night, damaging houses, educational institutions, crops and uprooting numerous trees.

At least 40 people were injured, most of them in house collapse. The strong winds accompanied by rain and thunder also damaged pucca

constructions and uprooted electric supply poles, snapping power. Several hundred thatched houses were blown away.

Several thousand people are now under the open sky.

At least four educational institutions were razed to the ground by the storm that lashed the area for about two hours from 9 pm.

Power supply was restored in the district headquarter at about 12:30 pm yesterday but other areas of the

district were without power till writing this report at about 2 pm.

The district agriculture office said IRRI-Boro crops on several thousand acres of land were damaged.

The damaged educational institutions include Sheikh Fazilatunnesa High School and Nabarupa High School in Dimla, Tupamari Sarkar Para Primary School and Jamyatul Sunnah Madrasha in the Sadar upazila.



PHOTO: STAR

Awami League General Secretary Abdul Jalil (L) addressing Magura district AL council held at Asaduzzaman Auditorium in the town yesterday.

Expulsion goes, showdown follows

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Charghat upazila BNP president Abu Sayeed Chand staged a showdown in Rajshahi city yesterday after his expulsion from the party for assaulting a government official was 'withdrawn'.

Several thousand BNP activists mounted on several hundred motor-bikes and crammed in buses, micro-buses and trucks crossed the city streets in a show of strength and support to Chand.

With Chand waving to people from a vehicle, his supporters chanted slogans against BNP lawmakers Barrister Aminul Haque and Nadim Mustafa, but hailed Rajshahi city Mayor Mizanur Rahman Minu MP and lawmaker Kabir Hossain.

The supporters welcomed Chand

at the airport after he reached here from Dhaka and escorted him out of the town. A large number of policemen and members of elite force Rab were deployed in the city to maintain security.

Sources said, Minu and Kabir backed Chand in staging the showdown to prove their supremacy over Post and Telecommunication Minister Barrister Aminul Haque and Nadim Mustafa, the two party men who were dominant in the party's city and district committees.

BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan in an order on March 12 expelled Chand from the post of upazila BNP president and withheld his membership for 'activities against the party constitution'.

District BNP President Azizur Rahman and general secretary Shish Muhammad, who are known to

be supporters of Aminul and Mustafa, had recommended Chand's expulsion for 'misbehaviour' with party seniors and 'assaulting' upazila social welfare officer Quamruzzaman on February 28.

On April 2, the expulsion order was, however, 'withdrawn' and he was reinstated to the party post following intervention by lawmakers Minu and Kabir, party insiders said.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, district BNP president Azizur Rahman however said, "Chand has not been reinstated to the party post, only his membership has been retained".

"I recommended Chand's expulsion for his illegal activities and assaulting a government official. The party also took action", said Rahman.

'Unfair' job order by Patuakhali WDB

Office locked, officials 'missing', protests on

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The Water Development Board (WDB) office in Patuakhali is locked since Thursday as officials are not attending office following alleged irregularities in distribution of Tk 20 crore development work.

This correspondent during a visit to the office at about 11 am yesterday (Monday) found five out of seven rooms locked, including that of the Executive Engineer, while about 200 enlisted contractors were demonstrating on the premises demanding his removal.

They alleged that the works were distributed among some 'selected contractors' for kickbacks.

A good number of contractors told this correspondent that the officials 'fled away' fearing 'harassment' after issuance of work orders through 'underhand deals'.

Abdul Berek Howlader, a contractor, alleged that the Executive Engineer left his office on Thursday night after issuing work order (WO) to selected contractors, violating rules.

"He (Executive Engineer) issued at least 10 work orders (Wos) on the night (of Thursday) and left Patuakhali keeping the office under the disposal of Anwar Hossain, a clerk", he said.

The contractors said about 50 of them sent a written complaint to higher authorities on Sunday demanding action against the WDB officials for their alleged wrongdoing.

Tender for the works (Group No. 76 under notice No. 9) including construction and reconstruction of sluice gates and embankments and re-excavation of canals in seven upazilas in the district were floated on January 31 this year.

They alleged that officials including the Executive Engineer, Section Officer and Sub Divisional Engineer (SDE) did not come to office during day time since March 31 after they distributed the work to 'selected contractors'.

A firm (name not mentioned) submitted a quotation for construction of a sluice gate (No. 43/2(D) at a cost of Tk 48,33,731 but the WO was issued to a firm which quoted Tk 50,71,927, it was alleged. The WDB will incur an additional expenditure of Tk 2,38,196 on this count, sources added.

A woman, who owns a firm, said she submitted a quotation (group work no 86 under tender notice no 9) for re-excavation of a 2.5 km stretch of Natua canal (under polder no-43/2(E)). She claimed that she was the lowest bidder but the WO was issued to another contractor.

They alleged that the quotations were opened at night in presence of selected contractors and the WOs were distributed among them.

Such irregularities were done last year also when Tk 14 crore WOs were distributed among some selected contractors, they alleged.

After last year's alleged irregularities, a group of contractors had detailed the irregularities at a press conference and submitted complaints to higher authorities, but to no result, they alleged.

At that time, the Executive Engineer was absent from office for seven days after distribution of work.

When contacted with Sub-Divisional Engineer (SDE) Zahir Uddin at his residence yesterday, he declined to make any comment regarding the allegations.

This correspondent also tried to contact the Executive Engineer on his mobile phone (no-0170-883937). "The mobile can not be reached now" was the reply always.



PHOTO: STAR

The desolate Patuakhali Water Development Board office, snapped yesterday during office hours.

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