



PHOTO: STAR

Writer and journalist Shahriar Kabir speaks at a rally organised by Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad at Mukhtangon in the city to mark the 'Black Day' yesterday.

Revocation of fifth, eighth amendments demanded

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speakers at a rally yesterday demanded immediate revocation of the fifth and eighth amendments of the constitution with a view to establishing equal rights of all people.

They urged the government to take effective steps to eradicate all kinds of discriminations against the minority people and give them equal rights to jobs.

The rally was organised by Bangladesh Hindu Bouddha Christian Oikya Parishad at Mukhtangon in the city to mark the Black Day.

"Fifth and eighth amendments of the constitution violate the fundamental rights of people and turns the minority as second class one, but all people including the minority one joined the liberation war in 1971," said Prof Nim Chandra Bhoumik, general secretary of the parishad.

Shahriar Kabir, noted journalist, said fanatic groups, under the shelter of BNP-led four-party alliance government, are torturing minority people.

"We will continue our movement until the government excludes Islam as state religion and includes secularism in the constitution," said Advocate Shirin Shikdar while presiding over the rally.

Justice KM Sobahan, Col Shawkat Ali, Nirmal Rozario, Advocate Satyendra Chandra Bhakta, Subrata Kumar Adhikari, Parimal Kumar Dey, Prem Ranjan Dey and Advocate Susanta Kumar Basu also spoke.

Later, a procession was brought out from Mukhtangon that paraded different city streets chanting various slogans.

48 get Begum Rokeya Shining Award-2005

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A total of 48 outstanding personalities--34 women and 14 men--received Begum Rokeya Shining Personality Award-2005 from Narikantha Foundation yesterday in recognition of their significant contributions to the society.

The foundation also honoured theatre personalities Aly Zaker and Sara Zaker as the best couple of the year at a ceremony at Osmani Memorial Hall in the city.

"Women bring changes to the family, economy and social structure and they change themselves," said Rokia A Rahman, former advisor to the caretaker government and president of Women Entrepreneurs' Association.

The outstanding women awardees include geologist Afiya Akhtar, actress Kabori Sarwar, entrepreneurs Kona Reza, Jeba Rashid Chowdhury, Jabin Noman, Jasmin Ahmad, Masuda Khan, Leoon Rokeya Islam, Hsina Doula and Hfiza Momtaj Hashi.

The other women awardees are Prof ZN Tahmidia Begum (public administration), organiser Jinat Ara Bhuyan, sports organiser Jobera Rahman Linu, Barrister Tania Amir, Dilara Hafiz (education), Parvin Haq Shikdar (banking), theatre personality Ferdousi Majumder, Ferdous Ara Begum (public administration), fashion designer and model Bibi Rasel, Bilkis Mansur (business), Valory A Teilor (humanitarian service), Roeyna Hossain (education), Rozalin Costa (human rights), Prof Rowshan Ara Begum (social work), organiser Rehana Banu, Rokhsana Zaman (banking), Dr Rashida Begum (medical science), Shaheda Obaed (education), Shahin Samad (music), Advocate Sultana Kamal (human rights), organiser Shirin Akhtar, Sarwat Ahmed (business) and Dr Halida Hanum Khondker (Aids prevention).

Outstanding men awardees are retired Major General Amjad Khan Chowdhury (agriculture), Anisul Haq (business organiser), Kabir Ahmed Bhuyan (medical service),

Tara Mia Khan (social work), Nasir A Chowdhury (insurance), Nazmul Hasan (medicine industry), Mofizuddin Sarkar (investment), Mahubur Rahman Shahin (human development), Dr Mostak Ahmed (medical research), Kazi Monsur-ul-Haq (social work), M Shahjahan Bhuyan (banking), Dr Saleh Uddin Ahmed (rural economy), Md Sabur Khan (IT) and Hsan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron (debating).

"Bangladesh women constitute a vulnerable group in the society and continue to be victimised," said Australian High Commissioner Loraine Barker, "But these shining women are examples of women empowerment in a very difficult situation."

The US ambassador Harry K Thomas said that he was impressed with the determination of these outstanding women to go beyond the limits. "I will leave Bangladesh in a few weeks, but I will remember the opportunities I have had in this country."

Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed of Biswa Sahitya Kendra, First Secretary of the European Union Anne Marchel and the Narikantha Foundation Executive Director Farhana Reza spoke among others.

Hasina condemns attack on Bogra AL office

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Opposition leader Sheikh Hasina yesterday condemned the attack on Awami League office at Sonatala in Bogra.

Hasina in a statement said the government is out to eliminate AL and that is why it is implicating its leaders and workers in false cases.

She demanded exemplary punishment to those involved in the attack on AL office at Sonatala in Bogra.

Hasina also demanded immediate release of AL leaders and activists and stoppage of the government repression on them.

Two 'criminals' die in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Two alleged criminals were killed in separate incidents of "crossfire" between the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and the associates of the criminals at Ataikula upazila in Pabna and Dohar upazila in Dhaka early yesterday.

The members of the elite force arrested Md Zahit, son of late Mazed Sheikh of Sheikhpara, from the Shreepur area on Wednesday. The Rab said Zahit was an accused in four criminal cases, including two for murdering 11 persons.

Based on information provided by Zahit, the Rab members took him to Ataikula to arrest his associates. But at Shibpur, his associates started firing on the Rab team, forcing it to counter.

During the shootout Zahit fell in the line of fire while trying to flee from the Rab capture, the Rab said. He was declared dead at Pabna

Sadar Hospital.

The Rab members recovered a revolver, two pistol bullets and a dagger from the scene.

BDNEWS reports another incident in which Bahadur Bahu, an accused in 12 different cases with the Dohar Police Station, was killed during a gunfight between his accomplices and the Rab at Jhanki village in Dohar.

The Rab-4 sources said they arrested Bahu from the city's Motijheel area on Wednesday. Later, following Bahu's confessional statement, they took him to Jhanki village of Narisha union in Dohar upazila to recover firearms.

The accomplices of Bahu opened fire there on the law enforcers triggering a gun battle in which at least 31 rounds of bullet were exchanged.

Bahu caught in the fire and died on the spot receiving multiple bullets, the Rab sources said.

Budget ambitious

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"Budget should be aimed at creating employment opportunities and facilitating industrialisation in the country but the proposed budget lacks such visions," Muhith, also a former finance minister, observed.

He also said the commoners of the country are least bothered about the budget as prices of all essentials, including fuel and utilities have already gone beyond their purchasing capacity.

Citing the growing inequalities in income, Muhith said in last few years wealth has been concentrated in the hands of a few people, making poor people poorer.

The former finance minister said the proposed budget has set so many targets but did not specify how those would be achieved.

Muhith said the budget does not match the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, and the disparity will hamper the country's achieving the Millennium Development Goal by 2015.

Referring to the finance minister M Saifur Rahman's claim of doubling the agricultural subsidy and support to farmers, he said, "It's on paper. The marginal framers did not have the benefit in last three years and will not get any in future."

He said the growth in the agricultural sector was above five percent during the tenure of the last AL government, but now it has dropped below three percent.

Rejecting also the government's claim of achieving 6.2 percent GDP growth, Muhith said, "As the country's rural economy and industrialisation did not see any development then how could the growth rate increase?"

About implementation of the

annual development programme (ADP), he said the coalition government could not fully implement the ADP in their last three years.

On the allocation of Tk 60 crore to Gram Sarkar, Muhith said it would only benefit the leaders and activists of the ruling parties.

Criticising the BNP-led coalition government for postponement of the development projects adopted by the AL, he said, "It's after three years that the government has started implementing the projects adopted by the Awami League government. Whereas, those projects should have been implemented much earlier."

Slamming the government for its 'failure' to utilise the foreign aid, he said the rate of utilisation of foreign aid hit the lowest in FY 2003-2004.

Besides, Muhith questioned the government's ability to increase the revenues.

For the last three years, former finance minister and AL leader SAMS Kibria used to brief the journalists on the budget. But following his death in a grenade attack in January 27, this time, Muhith, on behalf of the AL, briefed the journalists.

AL General Secretary Abdul Jalil, Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdul Hamid, Presidium Members Tofail Ahmed, Amir Hossain Amu, Motia Chowdhury and Opposition Chief Whip Abdus Shahid were also present at the press briefing.

Four killed in Comilla road accident

BDNEWS, Comilla

Four people, including a child and a woman, were killed yesterday as two passenger buses collided on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway at Mobarakpur area here.

The deceased could not be identified immediately.

Police sources said a Dhaka bound passenger bus coming from Comilla rammed another bus coming from the opposite direction, leaving drivers of both the vehicles dead on the spot and a number of passengers injured.

Of the injured, a three-year old child and a woman succumbed to their injuries at Gouripur Hospital and condition of seven others was stated to be critical.

Time extension

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"The finance minister himself had earlier mentioned that he would not extend the opportunity for whitening black money, but the extension for another year is a sad news for us," he said.

Appreciating the three percent subsidy or cash incentive for the export-oriented agro-processing industry, he said this will tremendously help boost the agricultural sector in the country.

Reducing the interest rate of agricultural loan for crop diversification and exemption of tax on poultry industry will also help the rural economy, he noted.

He agreed with the finance minister's speech that Bangladesh has consistently achieved some success in the social and economic fields, where all countrymen -- not any particular groups or persons -- contributed.

"We noticed the minister's careful efforts to bring in some changes in the light of PRSP [Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper]," Debapriya said, adding, "but a trend noticed in the budget is that he compromised on some issues like any other finance ministers."

The major changes made in the revenue collection might worry the common people, he noted.

Economist Dr Atiur Rahman, however, was not satisfied with the budget.

"We hoped that there would be a clear orientation as to which direction the economy of the country will go. But the minister gave no clear explanation how we shall reach the MDGs" [Millennium Development Goals].

He also criticised the finance minister for saying that the GDP, which had been projected at 5.5 percent last year, has now come to 6.27 percent.

Tk 7.75 lakh looted in Chittagong

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Robbers in the guise of hotel-boarders reportedly looted Tk 7.75 lakh from a business firm early Thursday at the city's Sadarghat area.

The police said the daring robbery took place at around 1:30am at the office of Alam & Company, a dealer of rod and cement, on the ground floor of Hotel Hero City owned by chairman of the firm MS Alam.

Alam told journalists yesterday that three boarders named Mohammad Ali and Mohammad Iqbal from Jatrabari, Dhaka, and Rafique Ahmad from Cox's Bazar on Monday night rented two rooms in his hotel. The boarders at around 1:00am on Thursday called hotel guard Abdul Haque to a room and offered him biscuits and cold drink.

"The guard soon became unconscious and the three burglars snatched the keys from him,

entered the office and took away Tk 7.75,000 from an iron safe," Alam said, adding that the gang also ransacked his office before leaving.

Top Chittagong Metropolitan Police officials rushed to the scene early yesterday.

The police said hotel manager Abul Kalam Azad filed a case with the Kotwali police station accusing the three boarders.

1,441 more held

UNB, Dhaka

Police arrested 1,441 people on various charges from different parts of the country in the last 24 hours as of 6:00am yesterday.

During the period, the law enforcers recovered 11 firearms, five other weapons, 28 bullets and 14 bombs, says a police headquarters press release.