

Festive look at Paltan

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP's grand rally at the Paltan Maidan yesterday afternoon assumed a festive look as thousands of people attended the rally with colourful banners, festoons, big placards, portraits of leaders and the party's election symbol sheaf of paddy.

The BNP leaders addressed the mammoth gathering from a large stage decorated with colourful banners and portraits of the party founder late president Ziaur Rahman and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia.

People started coming towards the ground from the morning with processions chanting slogans in favour of the party and the government and against the main opposition Awami League.

Party men wore red and green colour caps on their heads symbolising the national flag while many enthusiastic supporters sang and danced with band music.

Many party adherents carried BNP's election symbol sheaf of paddy, turning the rally into a big showdown for the next general elections.

Many BNP leaders came with big processions while their supporters wearing caps with slogans in favour of them rounded the venue.

People from various parts of the

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PM warns against anarchy

Asks a 'particular leader' to restrain tongue or face sedition charge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In an oblique reference to the opposition leader, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday warned her of sedition charges for "creating anarchy" in the country.

"Restrain your tongue... don't make any flaring remarks, refrain from creating anarchy, else sedition charges will be brought against you," she said.

Without naming anyone, the BNP chairperson also asked the particular 'leader' to abstain from issuing "provocative statements".

The government cannot be toppled by creating anarchy and blasting bombs, and any such bid will be thwarted with an iron hand, the prime minister told a huge public rally in the city's Paltan Maidan.

The rally organised by the ruling BNP turned into a human sea with party activists and supporters coming in thousands from across the country.

Khaleda expressed her government's firm resolve to rout militancy and said the militants will be put on trial under the Speedy Trial Act. She said anyone trying to create trouble will be dealt with accordingly and nobody will be spared.

She asked the opposition to keep away from the path of conspiracy



and destructive politics, and get involved in the roadmap of development.

The PM said elections will be held in time and according to the constitution. "If people vote for you, you will come to power," she told the opposition parties.

BNP has come to power winning a two-third majority and the democratically elected government will not be confused by anyone's provocation, she said.

The BNP chairperson urged the nationalist forces and those who believe in Islamic values to get united to build a happy and prosperous Bangladesh.

Listing her government's development programmes in the last four years, Khaleda urged the people to strengthen BNP to continue the development activities. She also appealed to the people to once again give their mandate for BNP.

The past Awami League government's "misrule", the opposition's

"destructive politics", suicide bombing, and the government's endeavour to root out the militants featured prominently in her 50-minute speech.

She was critical of the opposition in a large part of her speech.

The prime minister asked the people to be cautious about the conspiracy of the country's enemies, without specifying who are the enemies.

Leaders and activists from the capital and 64 districts travelling by bus, launch and train began to assemble at the Paltan Maidan since the morning.

By the time the meeting began in the afternoon the Paltan Maidan and its surrounding areas got submerged by thousands of BNP leaders and activists.

The slogan-chanting BNP

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No plan to file sedition charge against JMB men

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has no plan to bring sedition charges against the militants who have been carrying out bomb attacks on different government mechanisms, including the judiciary, since last August with a view to establishing "the rule of Islam".

According to sources at the home ministry, there has been no move so far to bring any sedition charge against the Islamist militants arrested with huge arms and explosives and publications on Jihad.

Over three months ago, State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar, however, said the government is not reluctant to bring sedition charges against the bombers.

"If we find their action amounting to sedition, there will not be any unwillingness on our part," the state minister told reporters on September 14. The government was examining the legal aspects of

the matter at that time, he said.

The militants, in a bid to achieve their goals, have been carrying out suicide attacks and bombings that so far killed 27, including two judges and four lawyers, and left people in abysmal insecurity.

Meanwhile, the arrested militants of the banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) have confessed to working to establish Islamic Shariah replacing the existing laws.

Legal experts termed the militants' target and activities anti-state and suggested filing sedition charges along with the criminal cases against them.

But the home ministry has asked the law enforcers to submit charge sheets against those so far learnt to be involved in the bomb attacks and bring them under conviction.

The law enforcers have arrested around 800 people since August 17 on charges of militancy and filed 181 cases, most of them under the Explosive Substances Act. The act

has a provision of 20-year imprisonment as the highest punishment.

Babar on September 14 said, "Cases have been filed across the country under the Explosive Substances Act and Special Power Act, which suit best, and the probe is on accordingly."

The law enforcers have so far submitted 85 charge sheets and sent eight cases to the Speedy Trial Tribunal.

The JMB carried out a country-wide serial bomb blasts on August 17, showing their strength against the state machinery, constitution and the existing democracy.

Its leaflets found at different blast sites described the country's constitution, judiciary and democracy as against the rule of Islam and said they will establish the Islamic Shariah.

Rejoinder, our reply

Lafarge Surma Cement Ltd in a rejoinder on The Daily Star report headlined "Niko pushes Bapex to okay its illegal pipeline: Negotiating gas price on its own with Lafarge" published on December 20 said that it is not negotiating to sell its gas at \$3 per thousand cubic feet.

Lafarge said it never had any negotiation with Niko or any other firm for the purchase of gas as it has an agreement with the Jalalabad Gas Transmission and Distribution Company.

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Cabinet may approve 3rd round bidding next week

BSS, Dhaka

Energy adviser Mahmudur Rahman yesterday said the cabinet is going to approve the third round of bidding for gas exploration as his ministry completed all initiatives to launch exploration of offshore reserves in the deep sea.

"The cabinet is expected to approve the proposal next week allowing us to go for seismic survey for deep sea exploration, after years of suspension of exploration activities," he told a roundtable on the

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A bird's-eye view of the BNP's grand rally in Paltan Maidan in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

PM's speech encourages militancy, says 14-party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Leaders of the 14-party opposition combine yesterday said Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has encouraged militancy by threatening to file sedition cases against the opposition leaders rather than the Islamist militants.

Reacting to the PM's speech at Paltan Maidan yesterday, the opposition leaders said Khaleda tried to protect and hide the militants who have waged a war against the country's rule of law as extremist elements are very much in her government.

On the reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission (EC), they

said they will compel the government to meet the demands through movement.

Awami League (AL) General Secretary and coordinator of the opposition alliance Abdul Jalil said the PM's blistering attacks on the opposition will not stop the ongoing struggle of the people.

"The BNP-Jamaat alliance has reached the edge of toppling and the prime minister's speech is nothing but a last-minute bid to inject enthusiasm into her party cadres," Jalil said.

He said sedition case should be filed against those in her government

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Road crashes kill 6 in Ctg, Sirajganj

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Six persons were killed and around 40 others were injured in three road accidents in Sirajganj and Chittagong yesterday.

Our correspondent in Sirajganj reports: Four persons were killed and 35 others were injured, six of them critically, in two separate road accidents in Sirajganj yesterday morning.

Police and witnesses said three persons died and 35 others were injured as a Dhaka-bound passenger bus and a cattle-laden truck hit a rice-laden standing lorry when behind at Kodda on the west side of the Jamuna bridge.

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Thriving admission trade led to killing of JCD leader

SHAHEEN MOLLAH

Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) leader Saidur Rahman was murdered Tuesday over a conflict surrounding a quota allocated for a special JCD committee for admission to the Titumir Government College.

Some unidentified youths sprayed bullets on the JCD assistant general secretary of the college unit as he was coming out of Mohakhali Wireless Gate Central Jame Mosque. Critically injured, the 27-year-old was then rushed to

Dhaka Medical College and Hospital where the doctors declared him dead.

Family members of Saidur said for the last few years a special JCD committee has been securing admission quota of 200 to 250 students with JCD affiliations for honours courses in the college.

Some influential leaders of BNP and its various front organisations had also been pressuring the committee to include their own people in the list of quota, but Saidur, who was a committee member, always protested the intervention by the lead-

ers who are not part of the college unit.

Many other JCD leaders and Titumir College Sangsad leaders also had joined Saidur in the protest making it stronger. "That could be the reason why some people backed by some BNP leaders might have murdered Saidur," a member of his family said.

He had lobbied to secure the candidacy for the post of general secretary of the college student government, but the election was postponed following directives

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CPD ON WTO TALKS

Lack of political, negotiation skills let Bangladesh down

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Unlike others, Bangladesh has utterly failed to obtain any benefit from the just-concluded Hong Kong WTO Ministerial Conference due to lack of understanding of issues and lobbies involved as well as negotiation skills.

"In Doha we received assurance, in Cancun we had faith, but in Hong Kong we have become totally frustrated," remarked Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Executive Director Debapriya Bhattacharya at a press briefing yesterday.

The Geneva text, the first draft of the Hong Kong Declaration, prepared by technical experts offered the least developed countries (LDCs) including Bangladesh duty- and quota-free market access for all products to all countries. But, Debapriya said, Bangladesh lost the free market access for its textile products due to a "lack of political skill" at the Ministerial that made a series of modifications to the draft.

"However," he said, "all is not lost yet. As 2006 is likely to be the last leg of the Doha Round, this year will be a very critical one for Bangladesh. It can still achieve much or lose even more."

"To gain from the upcoming follow-up negotiations," Debapriya

said, "Bangladesh will definitely require strengthening the Geneva Mission and the commerce ministry on an urgent basis. The ministry will also have to devise means and methods to effectively draw on other trade analysis capacities available in the country."

A four-member CPD team comprising Debapriya, Mustafizur Rahman, Uttam Kumar Deb and Fahmida Khatun that participated in the December 12-18 Ministerial Conference and other related events. The CPD yesterday launched a trade policy brief containing the team's reflections on the outcomes of the conference from Bangladesh's perspective.

In the Hong Kong Declaration, the USA agreed to give duty- and quota-free market access for 97 percent of LDC products, excluding textiles that account for 42 percent of Bangladesh's total exports.

The CPD brief termed Bangladesh's initial ambition for free market access for all its export items justified, but said a number of factors contributed to the non-realisation of that. "Indeed, from Bangladesh's point of view, the adopted Declaration was of lower value in comparison to the Geneva text," it maintained, adding, "the Geneva text was adopted with

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Trees fall victim to city road scheme

100 already cut down, 900 more to go

PINAKI ROY

The authorities are removing parts of the remaining greens in the capital late in the night as part of a road-widening project.

Dhaka Urban Transport Project (DUTP) of the city corporation is felling the trees along the road from Bijoy Sarani fountain to Banani level crossing in the dark.

The DUTP workers have already cut down about 100 trees in the last few days. Different government departments had planted the trees at the call of the prime minister a few years ago.

Environmentalists fear the authorities will fell about 1,000 trees, mostly devdaru, acacia and eucalyptus, due to lack of long-term planning.

"We are extending the airport road from six to eight lanes and we have to remove some trees. But we want to save some of those," said DUTP Director Syed Kudrat Ullah.

The authorities have however shown no intention of saving any of the roadside trees. They have marked white all the trees along the road to be cut down under the Tk 18 crore project scheduled to be complete by June next year.

"We have been directed to cut down all the white marked trees," a

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Hundreds of trees along the airport road in the city are being chopped down as part of a road-widening scheme under the Dhaka Urban Transport Project. The photograph was taken at 2:00am yesterday near Banani level crossing.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN