

Incorporate indigenous people's issues into election manifestoes

Ethnic community leaders tell political parties

MOON MOON SULTANA

Leaders of indigenous community have called on the political parties to incorporate the issues of the constitutional recognition of the ethnic people and separate land commission for them into election manifestoes.

They also threatened not to exercise their franchise in the election if the political parties ignore their call.

"The constitutional recognition of indigenous people is a political issue. It would not be possible to fulfil our long-standing demand without political commitment," Anil Marandi, president of Jatiya Adivasi Forum, said last week.

Considering the 14-party alliance as 'friends', the indigenous people tried several times to persuade them to include the issues in election manifesto, but to no avail, he said.

"We will take tougher decision such as boycott of the vote in our regional meeting," he said, adding that the indigenous people constitute a 'vote bank' in 22 electoral constituencies in the northern region.

Over 15 lakh ethnic people living in Dinajpur, Parbatipur, Nawabganj, Natore, Lalpur, Sirajganj, Raiganj, Godagari and Tanor of greater Rajshahi are deprived of social, political and basic human rights as they do not have constitutional recognition, he added.

Sanjib Drong, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, said it is not possible for them to get elected in the existing electoral system unless they have constitutional recognition.

The constitutional recognition will also help them participate in local administration, he added.

There are reserved seats for indigenous people in parliaments of

neighbouring countries, including India and Pakistan, which helps ensure their participation in administrative activities, thereby protecting their rights, said Sanjib, who is a member of Garo community.

Another burning issue for the indigenous people is establishment of a separate land commission. Thousands of indigenous families in the northern region are losing their lands as there is no separate land commission for them.

"In the last 35 years, over 2500 indigenous families have been evicted from their lands by the forest officials in the name of afforestation," Rabindranath Soren, general secretary of Jatiya Adivasi Parishad, alleged.

In addition, ethnic people are losing their dwelling houses and croplands due to false case, encroachment and non-cooperation from local administration, he added.

At a discussion on the demands of the indigenous people of the northern region held in the city on January 6, Prof Mesbah Kamal, general secretary of Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolon, said,

"Indigenous people believe in 'community ownership', not in the 'ownership by document'. They are losing their ancestral lands as they do not have necessary documents."

According to Prof HKS Arefin, president of Bangladesh Adivasi Odhikar Andolon, there is no constitutional obstacle to giving constitutional recognition to indigenous people.

When contacted, joint general secretary of Awami League Obaidul Kader said, "Since the indigenous people are an integral part of the country's population, we should take necessary steps to consider their reasonable demands."

'Enact laws to protect HR of indigenous people'

RU CORRESPONDENT

Adibashi (indigenous) leaders yesterday demanded enactment of appropriate law to protect their human rights including culture and heritage.

They also demanded a separate ministry for indigenous people and special allocation for them from national budget to ensure equal rights with other citizens of the country.

The demands came at a discussion and warm clothes distribution programme among the cold-hit poor Adibashi male, female and children on Kakonhat upazila Adibashi Sangskrity Unnayan Sangsht (ASUS) office premises.

The programme was organised by ASUS.

The Adibashi leaders urged the government to ensure their rights to land and vote because they are still facing ethnic discrimination.

They called upon people from all walks of life to come forward to help ensure their rights.

The programme was attended by Rishikul UP Chairman Jahangir Ahmed Sarker as chief guest while ASUS Executive Director Rajkumar Sawwas in the chair.

Jatiya Adibashi Parishad President Anil Marandi, Adibashi leader Gones Mazi and Modhusudan Mitra also addressed the programme.

At least 200 blankets and 100 jackets were distributed among the cold-hit Adibashi people.

'Help cold-hit people'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (BSD) yesterday called upon benevolent people to extend their helping hand to cold-hit people by donating warm clothes and cash.

In a statement, the BSD also called upon its leaders and activists to join the warm clothes and fund collection campaign and distribute those among the cold-hit poor people.

The BSD has already distributed 30,000 pieces of warm clothes in Dhaka, Chittagong, Feni, Narayanganj, Bogra, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Rangpur, Sirajganj, Naogaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur districts.

Meanwhile, Samajtantrik Chhatra Dal, in a statement yesterday, also called upon students and teachers to extend their cooperative hand to cold-hit people of the country.

Newly married couple donate Tk 1.45 lakh to cancer hospital

Rezwan Sharif and Rupsha Iqbal, a newly married couple, have set a wonderful example by donating the money they received from the guests at their wedding reception to Ahsania Mission Cancer Hospital (AMCH), now under construction at Utara in Dhaka, says a press release.

They handed over a cheque for Tk 1.45 lakh to Dhaka Ahsania Mission President Kazi Rafiqul Alam at the Mission Bhaban in the city yesterday.

The couple had requested their guests in the invitation cards to donate money for AMCH instead of presenting gifts to them. And the response was overwhelming.

Rupsha said, "My father SA Mohammad Iqbal, a former deputy controller general, died of cancer. Remembering the memory of my father, we requested the invitees to donate money to the cancer hospital instead of presenting gifts. We are very happy that all guests responded positively to our request."

Rezwan, an expatriate living in the US, expressed his satisfaction for being able to collect money for the AMCH. He said he will try to collect funds for the AMCH on his return to the USA.

Rezwan's sisters Dr Iffat Sharif and Imrana Sharif and Ahsania Mission USA Inc Secretary Anisul Kabir Jasir were present at the ceremony.



PHOTO: FOCUS BANGLA

Traffic congestion continues to add suffering to commuters in the city. This picture was taken from Paltan area yesterday.

POLITICAL PROGRAMMES

'Work overtime to offset losses'

DU CORRESPONDENT

International Business Forum of Bangladesh (IBFB) yesterday urged all business organisations, including ports, banks and industries to work overtime to recoup the losses caused by recent political programmes, a press release said.

The release, signed by IBFB acting president ATM Saidul Islam, also hailed the declaration of the state of emergency by President Iajuddin Ahmed.

"Considering the political unrest, gridlock in business and industries and sufferings of people, we see the emergency as a positive way to overcome the crisis," he added.

Saidul, however, urged the president not to prolong the emergency as it will have negative impact on potential foreign investment.

The IBFB also welcomed the new advisers of the caretaker government.

ment and hoped that they will be able to hold a free, fair and neutral election with the participation of all political parties.

1518 arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

During countrywide raids in last 24 hours, members of police and Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) arrested 1518 people for having direct involvement in criminal activities.

Besides, they recovered 80 rounds of bullets, six cocktails and 11 firearms and arrested nine for possessing illegal firearms, says a press release.

During the raids, 82 illegal motorbikes were seized and 232 cases were lodged against illegal bike possessors.

They conducted search operations in 235 cargo boats in last 72 hours.

OIC hails Fakhruddin's appointment

UNB, Dhaka

Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has welcomed the appointment of Fakhruddin Ahmed as the new chief adviser to the caretaker government.

OIC Secretary General Professor Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu in a statement made in Jeddah yesterday expressed his confidence that the new caretaker government in Bangladesh would be successful in creating conditions leading to the lifting of the emergency and for the holding of the next general elections in a free, fair, impartial and peaceful manner with participation of all the political parties.

He said the OIC is prepared to offer its fullest cooperation to the caretaker government and expressed his willingness to send a team of observers at the time of holding the polls.

STATE OF EMERGENCY

Juta polls uncertain

JU CORRESPONDENT

Election to Jahangirnagar University Teachers' Association (Juta), scheduled to be held on January 27, has become uncertain due to probable rules being formulated by the government to impose a ban on the activities of trade unions, clubs and associations during the state of emergency in the country.

A meeting between the three-member election commission and the incumbent executive body of Juta is due to be held today to decide whether the election should be held or not.

"We may seek legal interpretation from our lawyer," said Election Commissioner Prof Sikander Dara Shamsuddin.

According to Juta constitution, election to 15 posts must be held within December and could be deferred by one month in case of emergency. If it is not possible to hold election within that period, a general meeting of Juta will be convened to decide on next step.

The election schedule was announced on January 11.

January 20 is the last date for submitting the nomination papers.

A total of 380 teachers are expected to exercise franchise in the election to be held at the University Teachers' Club.

Trader robbed of Tk 8.5 lakh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Miscreants snatched away Tk 8.5 lakh from a trader in Chittagong city yesterday morning.

Sources said three unidentified miscreants in a CNG-run auto-rickshaw obstructed Abul Kalam in front of Bay View Kindergarten School at around 9:00am when he was going to deposit Tk 8.5 lakh at Pahartali Bazar branch of Pubali Bank.

The miscreants snatched away the bag full of money punching Kalam and flew the scene.

Kalam, owner of a grocery shop at Pahartali Bazar, said he kept the money earned in the last few days at home failing to deposit it due to political unrest and the government holidays.

He had just crossed around 300 gauges off his home at Ashraf Ali Road in Pahartali by rickshaw, police said.

A case was filed with Pahartali Police Station in this connection.

JU classes resume today

JU CORRESPONDENT

Academic activities at Jahangirnagar University (JU) will resume today after a 17-day vacation on the occasion of Eid-Ul-Azha.

Not many students turned up to the campus till Saturday due to the uncertain political scenario in the country and declaration of state of emergency.

Students and teachers of different departments who have been experiencing severe academic gridlock from one year to over two years however expressed satisfaction over the declaration of the emergency.

Teachers, intellectuals, journalists and student political leaders condemned the interim government's decision of putting censorship on press and freedom of speech.

Administrative activities resumed on January 8 after the vacation.



Rezwan Sharif and Rupsha Iqbal, a newly married couple, hand over a cheque for Tk 1.45 lakh to Dhaka Ahsania Mission President Kazi Rafiqul Alam at the Mission Bhaban at Dhanmondi yesterday.