

Jalil pleads for release

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Meanwhile, political leaders and analysts questioned the authenticity and timing of the petition and said it is not yet clear to them if the AL general secretary has taken the decision voluntarily or was forced to do so following an understanding.

"We want to hear from a free Abdul Jalil, not a detained one why he has decided to quit politics," AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta told The Daily Star.

Political observers have termed the petition unprecedented saying that no seasoned politician has pleaded for mercy in the recent political history. It came at a time when both Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia are under tremendous pressure to leave politics and allow radical changes in their parties.

Former adviser to the caretaker government, M Hafizuddin Khan, last night told The Daily Star that there might arise a question in public mind whether Jalil has signed the petition willingly or under duress.

Pro-reform BNP leaders have already announced a set of proposals including the one aiming to dislodge Khaleda Zia from the post of chairperson while three AL presidium members have come up with reform proposals apparently seeking to curtail the absolute powers of the AL president.

Following HM Ershad's decision to step down as the chairman of Jatiya Party, it has been widely discussed that some even more dramatic developments might unfold in the weeks to come.

ABOUT ALAND HASINA

Jalil, known for his loyalty to Sheikh Hasina, said the AL is a democratic political organisation having a constitution that champions democracy.

"The party had been functioning democratically but for us it has lost its democratic character and become a party centring around an autocratic leadership," he said adding that the democratic characteristics of the AL have been ruined because of sycophantic devotion to the party chief having total authority at her command.

The way the AL president runs the party gives no one any chance to go against her decision, said the former commerce minister adding that she (Hasina) was not even interested to hear objection from anyone and it all has proved disastrous for the party.

ABOUT SUPPORT TO THE CG

"Following the developments of January 11, the caretaker government backed by our favourite armed forces had been given full support. We also attended the oath taking ceremony," said Jalil in the petition.

He said they had decided to help the government carry out necessary reforms. "But from out of nowhere our leader [Sheikh Hasina] called for an election instead of giving the government enough time. She took the decision unilaterally, disregarding the majority view," said the AL general secretary.

The AL central working committee at a meeting on March 3 was unanimous in its opposition to the demand for an election within June and decided that the government would be given more time.

"But she defied the committee's decision and continued making contradictory statements. Then, before leaving the country she announced at the airport that in future all activities of the present government would be legitimized. But again, when she had barely reached abroad she began making rather erratic speeches, causing harm both to the part and the country," Jalil continued.

That's how she has become a reason for damage to the country, party and even herself. Because of her, the country has been through growing unrest, said the detained AL leader adding that he does not support her activities and no one could do so either.

For the welfare of the nation as well as itself, the AL must promote democratic practices, noted Jalil, chairman of the Mercantile Bank.

The AL needs immediate changes. If it cannot be freed from the authoritarian leadership, it will mean dire consequences for the party and the country. In the past, terrible blunders were made and serious harm done to the party for the way it had been run, said the detained AL leader.

Opportunist and selfish people have been given priority over the dedicated workers and leaders.

ABOUT HIMSELF

"I was elected the general secretary of Awami League at a council conference. As per the party constitution, the post carries a lot of responsibilities. But I was not allowed to do my job properly. I had to follow the party chief's dictates and pander to

her whims," said Jalil.

He added that he tried to make her (Hasina) understand but to no avail. He had worked on her directives even though it all went beyond his morality because he never wanted any split within the AL.

"Question may arise why I did not resign. I thought dispute and rift that might follow [resignation] would harm the party. Besides, the post is a highly respectable one. Thousands of leaders, workers and admirers revere the general secretary of a party like Awami League. It is my failure that I couldn't resist the temptation to continue in the post and I am sad and ashamed for this," he said.

FUTURE ROLE

Jalil said the country would have to suffer an extensive loss if it couldn't be liberated from the present political situation. It's everybody's patriotic duty to support the present caretaker government. And that is why he always pledged all-out support for the government in all his previous statements.

"The next parliament must ratify all activities of the present government for the sake of sustainable development," said the former minister adding that if he's given an opportunity, he would do whatever he can to that end.

He said he supports the caretaker government's anti-graft drive and initiatives to have a parliament free of black money and muscle power. He would leap at the chance of doing something to help the government attain that goal and would try his best to marshal support for that within his party.

"As a freedom fighter, as a man having sanity and democratic values I will be dedicated until the last day of my life to building a prosperous nation," Jalil added.

He also pledged that he is ready to do whatever he can to leave a democratic, secular, and healthy society for the future generations which was precisely the aim of the Liberation War.

"So again, I humbly request you (the president and the chief adviser) to give me a chance to live in a free environment, taking into consideration the circumstances I'm in."

WIFE'S APPEAL

Rehana Jalil yesterday said her husband's life is at stake due to critical conditions of his heart and kidney. "So I earnestly request the president and the chief adviser to give him a chance to stay alive," she said.

She said Jalil fought for the independence, democracy and for economic liberty of the countrymen. "He did politics with honesty and has strived for a liberal democratic party throughout his life," she added.

On numerous occasions at the party forum he stressed the need for a democratic and modern AL much before the present efforts towards reforms have been taken, said Rehana adding that leaders and workers of the party would admit it.

"So considering all these, I call on [the government] to release and allow him to stay alive as a conscious citizen and freedom fighter.

"I believe he will be able to make a significant contribution to the ongoing reform process. If freed he will work in favour of a free and fair election and against corruption and political criminalisation," she observed.

ACC

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notices on Sunday are Barisal City Mayor Mujibur Rahman Sarwar (BNP), former state minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman Patal (BNP), former prime minister Khaleda Zia's assignment officer Dr Firoj Mahmud Iqbal, former AL MP Noor E Alam Chowdhury, former chief whip Abul Hasnat Abdullah's (AL) son Moeed Abdullah and former state minister Major (retd) Kamrul Islam's son Tanvirul Islam.

Of the above named individuals, Sarwar and Patal are now in jail.

The notices have been issued with summons under sections 26 (1) of the ACC Act, 2004 and section 17 of the ACC Rules, 2007. Under these provisions, the physical appearance of the summoned individuals is not mandatory.

The seven working days deadline will begin after receiving the notices. Upon application from the individuals, the commission, subject to valid reasons, may allow them another seven working days to submit their wealth statements.

Meanwhile, the ACC, as of yesterday, could not complete delivering notices to 17 corruption suspects of the second list, including former ministers Barrister Moudud Ahmed and Barrister Aminul Haque.

Khaleda

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constitution, and if it is not followed, it becomes "tantamount to violation of the party constitution".

At this stage, police allegedly applied force to restrain media men from covering the outdoor event, as there have been restrictions under the emergency rules. This led to a scuffle between the policemen and the journalists, resulting in injuries to several journalists.

Boy killed

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Sharmina Reshmin, urged the government to take immediate protective measures as landslides might also hit the tourist zone of the town.

The district administration is evacuating people living in the affected area.

Sazzadul Hasan, deputy commissioner (DC) of Cox's Bazar, said that he has visited the landslide-affected area and necessary measures are being taken.

They want

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Presidium member Tofail Ahmed however refrained from commenting on the matter.

AL Presidium member Matia Chowdhury also said it will not be right to comment on this matter before knowing everything clearly. "This is beyond my understanding on what grounds and for what reasons he [Jalil] gave such statement in detention," she said.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal President Hasanul Haque Inu said he personally respects Jalil's "personal" decision. He demanded that the caretaker government frees Jalil as there are no specific charges against him.

Jatiya Party (JP-Ershad) Presidium member Ziauddin Bablu also said this is Jalil's personal decision.

Chief adviser

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generation will not forgive us."

The CA urged all, including the PGR members, to make their contributions to this effort.

He said the PGR was established on this day in 1975 with all-round members of the army to ensure security to VIPs and to play a principal role at state-level protocol-related functions.

In 1991, following introduction of parliamentary form of government, the responsibility to ensure security of the head of the government also fell on them, he added.

The CA said as part of the professional army, the members of the PGR have many things to learn from the history and the course of events alongside the contemporary reality.

He said the responsibility of the PGR is challenging and full of pride as well as risky.

The head of the caretaker government hoped the members of the PGR will be able to maintain the highest standard of professionalism in the future as they had done in the past side by side with other members of the Armed Forces.

He said patience, sincerity, caution, obedience, patriotism, sense of discipline and professionalism of high standard are essential to carry out such an onerous responsibility. "I'm happy to see the reflection of these qualities among you," the CA told the rank and file of the PGR.

The CA recalled with respect the PGR members who embraced martyrdom while carrying out their duties. "The nation still today recalls with respect the example of their dutifulness, loyalty and sacrifices," he said.

He said security has now become a multidimensional subject in the backdrop of present world scenario. Regular training is necessary for further sharpening the knowledge and efficiency in this regard.

Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed, Navy Chief Vice Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam, Air Force Chief Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman and high military and civil officials were also present on the occasion.

BNP reformists

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draft of a comprehensive reform proposal to bring reforms in parliamentary and administrative affairs to 'change the country's political culture and ensure good governance'.

"We are also considering a proposal to set up a national security council and a monitoring cell to observe the parliamentary activities," a pro-reform leader said yesterday.

The proposals also include reduction of the government's tenure from five years to four years, banning political activities like hartal and road blockade, and making the parliament more effective.

The reformists are also planning to make suggestion as to how to make effective the parliamentary standing committee as a watchdog body to prevent corruption in the ministry concerned as well as in the government.

"Preparation is going on and the secretary general will tell you in details soon," said Sardar Shakhawat Hossain Bakul, a former lawmaker and close aide of Mannan Bhuiyan.

Several other former lawmakers, party leaders and workers also met Bhuiyan yesterday to discuss the reform issue.

Earlier on Wednesday, Bhuiyan told the reporters that they are preparing a new proposal regarding the overall political culture and state affairs, in addition to the proposal for the party.

Sigma sent to jail

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In the bribery case, Special Court judge AK Roy after a six-hour hearing of the prosecution and defence sides from 10:00am on charge framing also fixed the dates for taking witnesses' deposition from July 9 to July 19.

The court asked the jail authorities to ensure proper treatment of Sigma in line with the jail code.

The defence lawyers also appealed to the court for granting division for Sigma in jail.

Earlier, the defence lawyers submitted petition for the fifth time praying for adjournment of hearing on charge framing on grounds of Sigma's illness and absence of a senior defence lawyer. But the court rejected the petition and framed the charges. The defence lawyers had earlier got the hearing adjourned for 12 days by submitting petitions four times.

Sigma, secretary general of Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights, who was under treatment at a city hospital, was taken to the court in an ambulance. The ambulance entered the Sangsad Bhaban area followed by two vehicles of the joint forces. Sigma appeared before the court lying on a stretcher with oxygen pipes in her nose, and accompanied by her two daughters and sister Khushi Kabir at 2:40pm.

During the hearing, Nazmul Huda said normal situation is not prevailing in the country and justice cannot be ensured to him when there is someone to influence the process of law. "I know that for saying this, period of imprisonment might rise to 14 years from five years."

Questioning transparency of the court proceedings, Huda said it is a 'secretarial' or a 'camera court'. He also said a court's mind should be free of everything. At this stage, the judge said the court is free and fair, and that is why you can talk freely.

On the charge of taking bribe, Huda said, "I did not have any necessity to realise money using my power as minister since my profession (as barrister) is good enough to keep me going well. I was brought up like son of a zamindar and I worked for the country. The development that took place in the communications sector during my tenure is apparent."

As Sigma Huda lay pale and speechless on a stretcher, Nazmul defended his wife saying she is only publisher of the newspaper "Khaborer Antorale" and everything else including taking editorial decisions and signing cheques for it was done by me.

He further said the man who filed the case against him even knowing that he would also be an offender by filing the bribery case seems to be under severe threat and forced to file the case.

"Seeing different newspapers doing yellow journalism, I launched the newspaper intending to publish news of the deprived people, who were misrepresented in different newspapers," said Huda.

The hearing was then adjourned till 4:00pm after hearing the accused, prosecution and defence lawyers. On a request from Huda, the court allowed him to remain with his family until the case.

He said security has now become a multidimensional subject in the backdrop of present world scenario. Regular training is necessary for further sharpening the knowledge and efficiency in this regard.

Chief of Army Staff General Moeen U Ahmed, Navy Chief Vice Admiral Sarwar Jahan Nizam, Air Force Chief Air Marshal SM Ziaur Rahman and high military and civil officials were also present on the occasion.

Hill cutting

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anyone's involvement in illegally cutting or razing hills is proved," Nazmul Hoque, director of DoE, Chittagong, told The Daily Star.

The DoE has already sent notices to Alfa Real Estate Limited for implementing a housing project named Nandan Housing through hill cutting at Jangal Silimpur of the city's North Pahartali and to Lai Mia, owner of Hill View Steel Mills, in connection with hill cutting at Latifpur in Sitakunda.

5,000 farmers

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premises of the UNO (Upazila Nirbahi Officer) for fertiliser.

Before the Wednesday's violence, thousands of farmers used to line up for fertiliser at the UNO's office every morning during the last several days, the locals added.

The farmers demanded open sale of urea and they blamed Monjur Morshed, the UNO of Nachole, for Wednesday's occurrence and demanded his removal immediately.

Locals complained that the UNO has a bad reputation of misbehaving with people. The UNO on Monday physically assaulted a UP member, Sharif Uddin, during distribution of fertiliser at Moklipur.

Meanwhile, the three-member probe committee, headed by Additional District Magistrate Mustafizur Rahman, started its investigation. Other members of the committee are Sazzadur Rahman, additional superintendent of police, and Asim Kumar Malakar, deputy director of agriculture extension department.

The farmers demanded a fair probe by neutral persons and they alleged that the district administration committee has leanings toward the UNO.

hearing resumed.

ACC (Anti-Corruption Commission) Deputy Director Shafiqul Islam filed the case against the former minister and his wife with Dhanmondi Police Station on March 21 for taking Tk 2.4 crore in bribe from Mir Zahir Hossain, owner of Mir Akter Hossain Ltd, a construction firm.

On June 4, the ACC pressed charges against them. Zahir's deposition to a magistrate corroborated the allegations against Huda.

Huda is widely believed to be one of the most corrupt ministers in the past BNP-led alliance government.

CASE AGAINST HUDA
Managing Director (MD) of Uttara Motors Ltd Matur Rahman yesterday filed the case against Huda with Dhanmondi Police Station complaining that he had forced the company to pay Tk 1 crore.

According to the case statement, Huda "threatened to kill" the complainant and shut their business if he failed to make payment.

As scared Rahman paid him money at his office on three dates—December 1, 2002, Feb 19, 2003 and March 11, 2003, according to the complaint.

The complainant mentioned that he had given Tk 50 lakh in cash at Huda's residence and the rest Tk 50 lakh in two cheques on the three dates.

The joint forces arrested Huda from his Dhanmondi residence on February 4 on charges of corruption.

UK house

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several British news outlets reported, citing unidentified sources.

The two men slept upstairs and used the downstairs as a bomb factory, the outlets said. Officials would not confirm or deny the reports.

Denis O'Donnell of the local Paisley Cab Company told The Associated Press that his taxis had picked up suspect Bilal Abdulla, an Iraqi-born physician, from the house nearly 20 times since May.

Neighbor Susan Hay told the AP that police said they were 'stripping' the home Thursday morning to look for fingerprints and other forensic materials. A large tent set up on Sunday was hanging over the garage.

Two other suspects were arrested at staff housing at the Royal Alexandra Hospital in Paisley. A British security official said authorities were still investigating whether there were any suspects at large who may have on the peripheries of the plot. The official requested anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press.

There have been 38 racist incidents in the Glasgow area since the attack, police said, including beatings and an attack on a white youth by three South Asian youths who believed he was involved in a previous racially motivated attack. A South Asian-owned shop was also set on fire in Glasgow, police said. There were no serious injuries.

Muslim community leader Bashir Maan appealed for calm and said community relations remained strong. "We must remember these people were not from Scotland," he said of the suspects held.

Also Thursday, a subway derailed in the capital during rush-hour, leaving at least 37 people with minor injuries in an incident transport authorities believe was caused by an obstruction on the tracks.

Britain's terrorism threat level has been lowered following the capture of the eight suspects, and a British investigator arrived in Australia to question a detained Indian doctor.

Nepal 'living goddess' loses status

AP, Katmandu

A 10-year-old Nepalese girl was stripped of her title as a living goddess because she traveled overseas to promote a documentary about the centuries-old tradition, an official said Tuesday.

Sajani Shakya had her status revoked because she broke with tradition by leaving the country, said Jaiprasad Regmi, chief of the government trust that manages the affairs of the living goddesses.

Sajani is among several "Kumaris," or living goddesses, in Nepal, and as one of the kingdom's top three, is forbidden from leaving the country. However, last month she went to the United States and other countries to promote a British documentary about the living goddesses of the Katmandu Valley. She is to return to Nepal this week.

"We have begun the process to search for a new Kumari," said Regmi, adding that a task force would determine suitable candidates.

Isabel Whitaker, director of the film "Living Goddess" said she was shocked and saddened by this news and would make sure the girl's education was provided for. "The rule of not being able to leave was never a rule before.... Nobody ever said the Kumari can't travel" she said by telephone from London.

Whitaker said they filmed in Bhaktapur for a year. "We had been speaking with people we felt were authorities, and now these others are claiming they are," she said.

The film crew consulted anthropologists, the head priests of Sajani's temple and her parents, the director said. And she said the Nepalese Embassy helped arrange Sajani's trip to the U.S.

Living goddesses are worshipped by both Hindus and Buddhists. The girls are selected between the ages of 2 and 4 after going through several tests.

They are required to have perfect skin, hair, eyes and teeth, they shouldn't have scars or wounds, and shouldn't be afraid of the dark. They always wear red, pin up their hair in topknots and a "third eye" is painted on their forehead.

Devotees touch the girls' feet with their foreheads, the highest sign of respect among Hindus in Nepal.

During religious festivals the girls are wheeled around on a chariot pulled by devotees. Living goddesses usually keep their title until their first menstruation.

The main Kumari lives a sequestered life in a palatial temple in the capital, Katmandu. She has a few selected playmates and is allowed outside only a few times a year for festivals.

Others like Sajani are allowed to stay at home, attend regular school and take part in festivals.

The government last year announced a monthly pension of \$40 for serving and retired Kumaris. Previously, the main Kumari received only a gold coin during an annual festival and the other girls received whatever was offered by devotees.

Nepalese folklore holds that men who marry a former Kumari will die young, and so many girls remain unmarried and face a life of hardship. Critics have said the tradition violates both international and Nepalese laws on child rights. But the film director said the Kumari tradition can be modern as well.

"Sajani seemed to be a great example of how the tradition can move into the modern age," Whitaker said. She said she made the film because the living goddess tradition is beautiful and worth capturing before it disappears.

BB alerts

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There is no system of inspection and monitoring on the money exchange houses in the UK, the letter said, adding, "Thus, there is high risk for any bank to do money transfer business with such remittance houses."

Blast at China

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China has suffered a series of blasts, fires and accidents in shopping malls, cinemas and other public places despite repeated government promises to improve safety. Many are blamed on lax safety procedures and negligence.

In 2005, a fire in an illegally run bar in the southern city of Zhongshan killed 26 people. Local officials said that the bar lacked fire extinguishers, and that its emergency exit was too narrow.

In China's worst recent nightclub disaster, a fire burned on a wedding accident tore through a disco in the central city of Luoyang in December 2000, killing 309 people.

Local reports at the time said the building had failed 18 safety checks in two years.

Investigators blamed locked emergency exits for the large number of casualties.

Last December, China executed two men found guilty of causing explosions that killed two people at two Internet cafes in central China.

The two had been found guilty in connection with blasts in May 2006 at two cafes in Hefei, the capital of Anhui province. Xinhua gave no motive for the attacks.

Tigers put on some fight

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and the man who stood tall for Bangladesh to give some breathing space was none other than the new captain.

The defeat was almost inevitable after a first innings debacle when the Tigers were dismissed for 62 runs but the 22-year-old Ashrafui, now the only Bangladeshi to score four tons, was not ready to leave the stage without a fight during his 129-run unbeaten knock that contained 18 eye-catching boundaries.

He got tremendous support from Mushfiqur (80) to give the rich Sri Lankan attack a hard time.

"Ashrafui once again showed that he has the talent to play this kind of a quality innings. Bangladesh should look at this partnership because this was the way everybody should bat in the longer-version cricket. We toiled hard on the third day because of the excellent batting of the two," said man-of-the-match Kumar Sangakkara, who smashed 200 not out in his side's 451-6 declared, praising Bangladesh's efforts.

Everybody at the venue sensed a quick finish when former Bangladesh skipper Habibul Bashar was bowled by Dilhara Fernando in the fourth over of the third morning as the visitors were reduced to 78-5 after resuming on 69-4.

But 18-year-old Mushfiqur joined his captain to defy the Sri Lankans by showing in his third Test that he has a long future.

In a rare picture of Bangladesh cricket, the two petite batsmen fought against a world-class attack during a record 191-run partnership in a way that they never looked like getting out.

Their sixth-wicket heroics surpassed the Tigers' previous best for any stand, 187 between Shahriar Nafees and Habibul Bashar against Australia at Fatullah for the second

wicket.

Their efforts raised hopes of struggling off an innings defeat as well as taking the match into the fourth day but Mushfiqur's dismissal saw Bangladesh lose their last four wickets inside nine overs and 30 runs.

Spin wizard Muttiah Muralidaran remained wicket-less for 26 overs before giving the much-awaited breakthrough by taking a return catch of Mushfiqur, who drove a flighted delivery to put an end to his 183-ball essay. He hit nine boundaries and a six.

It was a treat to watch the way the young right-hander stepped out to loft Muralidaran over the wide long-off fence before playing over long-off in the next over. The two shots virtually relieved the pressure off his partner during a nearly four-hour stay.

On a few occasions, luck favoured the pair but they made most of the opportunities to go to lunch at 174-5 and added further 87 runs in the second session without any damage.

Ashrafui, who was three over-night, was as good as he had been during his previous centuries. The highly talented right-hander showed rare patience and determination against his happy hunting side to occupy the crease for 314 minutes.

Ashrafui, who now has three hundreds against the Lankans, was frustrated in the end to run out of partners.

Left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas caused the damage by taking the new ball and the veteran was on a hatrick after removing Mohammad Sharif (2) and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (0) in successive deliveries.

Vaas was the most successful bowler in the second innings with 4-55.

Israeli forces

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One militant from Hamas's armed wing was killed the clashes about a kilometre (about half a mile) deep into the Gaza Strip, from which the Jewish state withdrew all troops and settlers in 2005 after 38 years of occupation.

Among the dead fighters from Hamas's Ezzedine al-Qassam Brigades were Mohammed Siam, a local leader in the armed wing. Fifteen Palestinians were also wounded, including one seriously, medics said.

The Israeli military confirmed that troops and tanks were "operating against terror infrastructure" in the central Gaza Strip.

"We identified hitting approximately 10 armed gunmen in two air strikes and exchanges of fire on the ground. Two soldiers were wounded by an RPG fired at a bulldozer in the central Gaza Strip and were evacuated," a spokesman said.