

Hasina arrested

FROM PAGE 1
against me have been brought only to hold me back from the next general election."

On June 13, Managing Director of East Coast Trading Ltd Azam J Chowdhury filed the case at Gulshan Police Station, accusing her of extorting, with others, Tk 2.96 crore from him for the installation of a 210-megawatt power plant at Siddhinganj.

Some 1,000 members of the joint forces mostly from the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) and the police sealed off the Dhamondi Road No 5 area round about 4:40am in driving rain.

A 30-member dog squad along with at least 100 Rab and police members entered the Sudha Sadan premises at around 4:50am. Five minutes later, as they rapped on the door, Hasina asked her staff to let them in and tell them to wait on the ground floor.

She said she would see them but not before saying her morning prayers, a personal staffer of her told The Daily Star.

Immediately after gaining entrance, the forces snapped all land phone lines and seized all mobile phones in the house.

Minutes later, Sheikh Hasina came downstairs with her husband. "Why are you here? What wrong do you think I have done?" the staff quoted her as asking the waiting security personnel.

In reply, one of the joint forces men said, "We have specific charges against you and we are going to take you to court."

The last ones to talk to Hasina over phone were her son Saeed Wajed Joy and her daughter Saima Wajed Putul, both from the United States, and also her sister Sheikh Rehana. But the conversations ended abruptly as the phone lines were cut.

Earlier on Sunday night, she returned from the Bangabandhu Memorial Bhavan at around 10 and told all her relatives and staff that she was going to be picked up shortly. She asked them to be patient and not to panic.

At around 2:00am, her police protection was withdrawn. They were ordered to report back to the Rajbari Police Lines immediately.

During the two-and-a-half-hour raid, the law enforcers rummaged about all three floors of the building. They also sifted through her files and documents.

At that time, the former premier was accompanied by Wajed Miah

and two of her relatives--Shamim and Tutul. Her personal staffers were asked to leave the house at around 5:00am.

The joint forces set up at least three barricades on the road leading to the Sudha Sadan. Hundreds of Rab and police men stood guard throughout a two-kilometre radius of the residence.

Joy termed the case against his mother false and fabricated. "I strongly protest her arrest. Awami League leaders and activists across the world are united, and we will wage a movement and create public opinion to free her. We will contact government of the US as well as of other countries for this."

Asked if they will go for legal actions, Joy said the AL will surely take to legal fight. He however expressed doubts about its success saying, "There is no rule of law in Bangladesh now. There are many extortions there but the government is not arresting them."

He mentioned that he had talks with her mother before her arrest. "I told her my grandfather (Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman) was also arrested by the then Pakistani regime but it could do no harm to him."

Recalling the historic speech of Bangabandhu on March 7 in 1971, Joy said, "Our movement now is for building Bangladesh and establishing democracy there. Sheikh Hasina is the only person now who can lead it."

Asked what he will do while her mother is in politics, he said he will do whatever is needed for the party.

"I have not decided yet," Joy said when asked if he will come to Bangladesh.

REHANA
Rehana said any conspiracy against Hasina would not succeed and she would return to the people.

The case filed against her sister is false and the way the Father of the Nation's daughter was arrested was humiliating, Rehana said from the US when contacted over telephone yesterday.

Rehana, now in the US to stay with Hasina's daughter Sayma Wazed Putul who gave birth to a baby a few days back, said, "Bangladesh will never be like Pakistan... This is Bangladesh of Joy Bangla."

Putul is very worried over the arrest of her mother and has become sick, she said.

"The people are with us... They (government) cannot suppress us just as (Pakistani) military rulers could not suppress the Father of the Nation... Agartola conspiracy case (against him) is an example," Rehana said.

Terming Hasina a patriotic leader, she also said, "We have left the matter to the people and almighty Allah. And she (Hasina) will return to the people by foiling all conspiracies."

"Bangabandhu sacrificed his life for the nation. He did not bow down even facing threats of being hanged. So, this is usual that his daughter will also speak for the people," Rehana said, regretting that they are facing problems in independent Bangladesh.

"On the one hand, they (government) are talking of recognising Bangabandhu as Father of the Nation and on the other hand, they arrest his daughter."

She went on, "They (security personnel) have ransacked the house (Hasina's residence) and the same nature were filed against them," Menon said.

Question will be raised about the ongoing anti-corruption drive if the government mixes up the corrupt with the politicians.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Mujahidul Islam Selim said the legal procedures should be transparent if Hasina is arrested on charges of corruption. "All the information must be made public."

He said it would be undemocratic if Hasina were arrested to implement the political motives of the government.

He smelt political intention of the caretaker government behind the arrest. Issuance of arrest warrant was enough in such cases, he said.

"Some people like Jamaat leader Mujahid are moving freely in and outside the country though cases of same nature were filed against them," Menon said.

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AL leader Motia Chowdhury said Sheikh Hasina has been arrested because the so-called reformists will have no footing in their mission if Sheikh Hasina is active with her agenda in politics.

AL presidium member Abdur Razzak termed Hasina's arrest as 'sad'. But the way Motia Chowdhury is making comments and blaming the reformists is very unexpected and unnecessary, Razzak said.

"There are differences between the AL President Sheikh Hasina and the reformists but we all are for reforms in the party. But Motia's intentional comments involving the senior AL leaders is pushing the party towards divisions, which is mysterious," he said in a press release.

He called upon the leaders and the activists of all levels to be united to protect the party from the present situation.

AL leader Abu Sayeed said AL had taken resolution to support and cooperate the present caretaker government. But the dispute began because the leaders like Motia Chowdhury to the party chief Sheikh Hasina, he viewed.

"Today's arrest is the consequence of such ill suggestions," Sayeed said adding there was no need to oppose the reformists, as the party chief himself wants reforms. The leaders circling Hasina has actually separated from the others, he noted.

BNP Joint Secretary General Ashraf Hossain said, "We heard that she has been arrested but don't know more than that."

It is only the government who knew why Hasina was arrested, Ashraf said while replying to reporters queries following his meeting with the BNP Secretary General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan.

When asked about the fear of BNP leaders and workers regarding the possible arrests of Khaleda Zia and Mannan Bhuiyan, Ashraf said, "The government knows it. I don't know anything."

Joy vowed

Joy vows

FROM PAGE 1

caretaker government to remain in power for an indefinite period.

"This government thinks it cannot stay in power for an indefinite period unless it removes her (Hasina) from political arena," he told The Daily Star over telephone from the US where he lives.

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She accuses govt

FROM PAGE 1

elections. But no one in the country will believe that I committed extortion," a confident Hasina stated in her submissions to the court, which rejected her bail petition in the extortion case and ordered sending her into jail custody.

"Neither myself, nor my family were ever involved in any sort of corruption or extortion. I have not done anything wrong, let alone commit extortion. I am completely innocent, and I want justice from the court," Hasina pleaded before the court of Metropolitan Magistrate Kamrunnahar.

"I don't know what verdict you will give. Maybe the verdict has been fixed beforehand. If there is no democracy, there cannot be the rule of law," she told the court, adding, "I know you [magistrate] will not be able to give any orders beyond those from the higher authorities."

Referring to the military takeover in 1975 and the High Court judgment that declared the takeover as illegal, Hasina, the eldest daughter of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, said, "To satisfy political ambition of individuals, similar tactics are being adopted now."

"I think attempts are now being made to destroy political forces one after another and bring some other forces to power. The people's fate is being played with, but the people always take the right decision."

"Some people have been coaxed into splitting political parties. The greed and ambition to go to power or to become president by certain quarters is pushing the country towards ruination and destroying democracy," she said.

"Have they not committed corruption?" the AL chief posed a question.

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