

Party offices

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Talking to reporters, they described him as an agent of the government and claimed that Khaleda Zia is still their leader.

A group of former lawmakers including Major (retd) Akteruzzaman, Sohrab Hossain, Rehana Akter Ranu, Ferdous Wahida, and Helen Zerin Khan showed up at the party office at 11:00am.

Hundreds of supporters and workers cheered as Khandaker Delwar Hossain and RA Goni reached there at 1:40pm. They chanted slogans demanding immediate release of Khaleda Zia.

As the new secretary general approached the main entrance, the police on duty there told him that he must have permission for access. "Why should I need a permission to go into my office?" Delwar called the police officials.

Meanwhile, no-one from the faction led by Mannan Bhuiyan came to the party office. Since expulsion of Bhuiyan, the pro-reform group has been claiming that they represent the mainstream BNP.

"We don't want confrontation. Everything will be okay after the council," ZA Khan, a close aide to Bhuiyan, yesterday told reporters after meeting Bhuiyan at his Gulshan residence.

Khan, also an adviser to the BNP chairperson, said, "We will press ahead with the reform initiative and hold a council following due procedure."

AL

Leaders, workers and supporters of the AL flocked to the party's central office on Bangabandhu Avenue in their hundreds. The office reopened at about 10:00am.

Meanwhile, leaders and workers distributed sweets among themselves at Sheikh Hasina's Dhanmondi office yesterday morning. AL leaders Tofail Ahmed, Abdul Mannan, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Dr Abdur Razzaq, Asaduzzaman Noor, Lt Col (retd) Faruq Khan, and Dr Mostafa Jalal Mohiuddin, among others, visited the office.

At the central office, leaders and workers of front organisations sat at different floors of the building. They chanted slogans demanding release of the detained party president.

Barbed wire fences were set up on both the entrances to Bangabandhu Avenue with a huge number of law enforcers on guard to avert any untoward situation.

At Dhanmondi office, AL acting general secretary Mukul Bose told reporters that they thank the caretaker government for its decision. He demanded that the government withdraw the controls completely and the state of emergency.

Mukul, however, voiced dissatisfaction over certain conditions being attached to lifting of the ban.

Later as he went to the Bangabandhu Avenue at around noon, he drew the ire of leaders and workers of the party and its front organisations.

They asked him to issue a statement demanding immediate release of the AL chief and warned him not to speak over reforms. As some AL leaders tried to calm down the fuming workers, things got chaotic forcing Mukul to leave the place without visiting the central office.

A group of AL workers shoved Mukul against his car. They heaped abuse on him and asked

him to "cease to be an agent of the government".

Talking to the reporters, Mukul demanded release of Sheikh Hasina. "Now that an environment has been created after withdrawal of the ban, we must seek release of our party chief," he observed.

Asked whether they would join the dialogue with the Election Commission (EC) or take part in the next election with Hasina behind bars, he said the Central Working Committee would meet soon to discuss the party's strategy.

"If the working committee decides that we should not participate in the talks before release of Hasina, we'll abide by the decision," Mukul said adding that they would hold a meeting tomorrow with the central leaders up to organising secretaries.

In the afternoon, Dhaka city AL held a mild mahfil at the central office. After the special prayers, AL Presidium Member Motia Chowdhury described the cases filed against as false and fabricated and attempts to have the former premier detached from the people as well as the leaders and workers.

She demanded that the government lift the ban on politics completely. A pro-Hasina leader, Motia also urged the government to keep the prices of essentials within the people's reach during the Ramadan.

JP

The Jatiya Party yesterday urged the caretaker government to lift all conditions on indoor politics.

"Not only in Dhaka, we want permission to hold meetings across the country as well," said Barrister Anisul Islam Mahmud, JP acting chairman, while talking to reporters at a press briefing at the party's Gulshan office.

"We will not get the full benefits of the initiative if the caretaker government does not lift its 11-point conditions to run indoor politics," he said hoping that the government will lift those conditions soon.

Praising the chief adviser's speech, the acting JP chairman said, "All confusion and unnecessary anxiety have been removed by his speech."

Lifting the ban on indoor politics would help the political parties to sit with the EC and therefore help to hold a free and fair election, he added.

Over reforms in the JP, Anisul said a reform proposal would be placed before the news media within three weeks.

JP presidium members Ziauddin Bablu and GM Quader were present among others at the briefing.

OTHER PARTIES

Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon yesterday demanded withdrawal of the state of emergency, claiming that the present situation and circumstances do not call for the continuation of emergency.

The chief adviser assured us that the national elections would be held in 2008. But we are not seeing any signs of holding the polls before 2008," he told reporters at his party office.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) President Hasanul Huq Inu, who attended a meeting at the central office of the party on Bangabandhu Avenue, said the government should now consider lifting the state of emergency.

Charges pressed

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after Sub-Inspector (SI) Golam Mahfiz submitted a petition to that end.

Halal was earlier cleared of two criminal cases filed with Shahbagh and Ramma police stations in which he was alleged to have violated the EPR on August 20 and 21 on the Dhaka University (DU) campus. Four DU teachers, however, were charge-sheeted in one of the cases.

The JCD president was accused of organising students and general people at different places on the DU campus from 10:30pm on August 20 to 12:00 noon the following day, violating the EPR.

DB police arrested Halal at his Moghbazar residence in the capital on Friday morning.

HUDA CASE

Metropolitan Magistrate Ashraf Uddin sent Huda to jail after SI Amirul Islam, who is also the IO in the case, placed him before the court at 4:30pm.

The court had placed Huda on a three-day remand on July 24 for allegedly forcing Uttara Motors into paying him Tk 1 crore. He was, however, taken for interrogation on September 7.

The IO in his forwarding report said the former minister gave important information on the extortion which was now being verified.

Matiur Rahman, Uttara Motors managing director, filed the case with Dhanmondi Police Station on July 5, complaining that the ex-minister threatened his life and wanted to force the company

MIGRANT WORKERS

Airlines asked to operate additional flights

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday urged local and foreign airlines to temporarily operate additional flights to ease off the pressure of thousands of overseas-bound workers who are stuck here due to shortage of flights, especially to Malaysia and Middle East.

Acting Secretary Sheikh Altaf Ali, during a meeting at the civil aviation ministry, also requested the airlines to reduce airfares to previous levels as many increased their fares by 25-40 percent.

The airlines, primarily Emirates, Etihad and Saudi Airlines, said they increased the fares as part of revenue management and it would not be possible for them to lower the fares, meeting sources said.

Representatives of various airlines, travel agencies, officials of the ministries of civil aviation, expatriates welfare and overseas employment and the Bureau of Manpower, Training and Employment (BMTE) were present in the meeting.

The airlines, apart from Air Arabia, did not appear to be very inclined to move on the government's call to operate additional flights immediately citing hassles of managing additional flights, meeting sources said.

Only Air Arabia, which now operates only seven flights from Chittagong to United Arab Emirates (UAE), sought approval of the government for operating 21 flights from Dhaka, meeting sources said.

Foreign airlines, however, expressed interest in operating more flights rather than operating additional flights temporarily.

In response to demands of an open-sky policy, the acting civil aviation secretary said the ministry would put the issue forward to higher authorities.

The secretary also urged Malaysian Airlines to operate all 14 flights from Bangladesh. The country manager of Malaysian Airlines said he would discuss the matter with the management of Malaysian Airlines.

Despite having approval to operate 14 flights a week, Malaysian Airlines only operates seven flights from Dhaka to Kuala Lumpur.

In reply to the government's call Saudi Arabian Airlines, which operates 12 flights weekly, said it is unable to operate additional flights immediately.

During the meeting, Association of Travel Agencies Bangladesh (ATAB) urged Saudi Arabian Airlines to allow travel agents to confirm the tickets of Saudi Arabia-bound workers who now have to wait in a long queue for hours in front of the airline's office at Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel in the city to re-confirm their tickets.

According to BMTE officials, there are 57,000 workers ready to fly to their destinations. Travel and recruiting agencies said many of the workers' visas have already expired and many are about to lose their visas for not being able to fly to their destinations.

Smith's men showed they mean business when they stunned Australia by eight wickets in a practice match on Sunday, a win that key batsman Abraham de Villiers said was a real morale-booster.

"Victory is always important, especially against Australia because they're a well-drilled side," said de Villiers, who smashed 65 of 35 balls as South Africa chased down a target of 180 with five deliveries to spare.

"It wasn't just a warm-up game. It's a bit of a psychological advantage to beat the Aussies."

Australia's new coach Tim Nielsen admitted the swinging ball had caught the team "off guard", but the result only underlined that Twenty20 cricket is an unpredictable sport.

In other practice games, Pakistan beat World Cup finalists Sri Lanka by five wickets and New

Zealand stumbled to a 35-run defeat at the hands of the West Indies.

"Any team can win this one," said India's newly-appointed captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni. "If you thought 50-over games were unpredictable, this one is a lottery."

"It all depends on how well a team plays over the three hours. One bad over can be the difference between winning and losing."

South Africa's de Villiers said a way out to master the Twenty20 game was to chase a target rather than set one.

"It's not easy to find your feet and know if the target you've set is big enough if you bat first," the aggressive batsman said.

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Food prices

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report expressed optimism to rein in inflation. The present inflationary situation has resulted from the devastating floods and it is temporary, said the report submitted to government high-ups.

The report comprising present economic trends said a downward inflationary trend might be seen within a short time with the implementation of government post-flood programmes and increased credit flow from the banks.

Besides, prices of essentials may go down as government encourages private sector importers and increases public sector food import, the report added.

According to available data, inflation continued to rise during the five-year tenure of the last four-party alliance government.

After the departure of the political government, inflation rate showed a downward trend till January this year despite increase of prices of major food items in international market. But it again started going up in February.

Sources said price increase of electricity and petroleum products by the present government as well as its anti-hoarding drive that affected supply of goods resulted in further rise of inflation.

Leaders of the business community at a recent meeting with government high-ups also mentioned the causes behind continued price spiralling of essentials.

The share of food items in the consumption basket is about 63 percent in the rural areas and 49 percent in the urban area. Seven essential food items including rice, wheat, flour, lentil, soybean oil, potato, onion and sugar account for about 37 percent of the annual household expenditure of 20 percent of the population in the lowest income group. Soaring prices of essentials, especially food items, hit them the hardest.

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sugar however went down by 31.33 percent during the same period.

Renowned economist Prof Rehman Sobhan at a recent seminar organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) said inflation hurts ordinary people of the country. So, monetary policy of the central bank should ensure their welfare.

Appreciating government measures after the devastating floods in 1998, he said the central bank should take proper steps in line with those post-flood programmes.

Meanwhile, the government has already taken some initiatives to check inflation.

The chief adviser in his address to the nation on Sunday mentioned some government programmes like Open Market Sale (OMS). Price of rice under OMS has been fixed at Tk 19 a kg against the import cost of Tk 25 per kg.

Import of 900,000 tonnes of food grains under government initiative during the current fiscal year is now being finalised.

Fakhrudin Ahmed reiterated that the government will ensure a situation where businessmen will not be harassed.

EC wants

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person to appear before it and make statement by swearing.

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DU violence

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four teachers should be relieved of the case in view of the patience and generosity shown by the interim government in improving the overall situation in the country.

It also hailed the chief adviser's speech which dispelled fears about the fate of huge number of unnamed students and teachers in the untoward incident.

The press release, jointly signed by Duta Vice President Prof Tajmery S A Islam, and its acting General Secretary Dr Mamun Ahmed urged all to remain vigilant to avoid such untoward incident in future. It also called upon all the teachers and students to keep congenial atmosphere in educational institutions.

In another press release, Bangladesh Mukti Joddha Kalyan Foundation yesterday demanded immediate withdrawal of the name of Prof Neem Chandra Bhowmik from the charge sheet submitted on Sunday in connection with the case.

Its chairman Maj Gen (retd.) K M Safiullah protested the 'implication' of DU Applied Physics Department Chairman Neem Chandra in the case.

Urging the authorities concerned not to harass any innocent person, he said Neem Chandra does not believe in violence and cannot be involved in such criminal activity.

US, UK, EU

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reform process. It is now vital that all groups work together to forge the progress