

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 (ret'd) Akhteruzzaman, Sohrab Hossain, Rehana Akhter 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 asked 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 Razzak, Asaduzzaman Noor, Lt Col (ret'd) 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 milad 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.

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, Ethihad 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 reconfirm 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 fly to their destinations.

Ki-moon

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wrote in the visitor's book at Banbat (Bangladesh Battalion) Officers' Mess in Juba, capital of southern Sudan, while he was attending a luncheon organised by Banbat.

During his daylong visit in Juba on September 3, the secretary-general also distributed medals to 16 UNMIS (United Nations Mission in Sudan) military members.

Ban Ki-moon was accompanied by a high delegation and a media team comprised of around 100 people.

The secretary-general during the visit met high officials, spoke with UN staff, addressed several gatherings/ legislative assembly and attended a dinner hosted by the government of South Sudan.

Bancon was highly appreciated by all for coordinating major parts of the secretary general's visit including ceremonial and non-ceremonial events.

CG LEADERSHIP

UNB adds: The United Nations (UN) has appreciated the caretaker government for its leadership in reforms.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon sent an appreciation letter to Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury in this regard on September 6, said a press release yesterday.

"I note with pleasure that under the leadership of the caretaker government, Bangladesh undertook significant reforms aimed at restoring public confidence in good governance," the secretary general said.

"I am confident that your government will continue its efforts in the best interest of the people of Bangladesh," he added.

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.

According to Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) data yesterday, prices of coarse rice increased by 26.27 percent, flour 44.19 percent, lentil 10.40 percent, soybean oil 41.35 percent, onion 80.49 percent and potato 2.63 percent in the last one year. Price of

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.

Fakhruddin 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.

The EC has already proposed strengthening the electoral enquiry committees, which are formed during the polls to check electoral irregularities, by increasing punishment for violation of the electoral laws.

In the draft proposals for massive electoral reforms, the EC wants to make mandatory registration of the political parties with provisions designed to ensure financial transparency and democracy within the parties.

It also proposed imposition of restriction on retired military or civil servants, loan and utility bill defaulters, NGO officials with regard to participation in the national elections.

The EC has also drafted stringent provisions relating to the code of conduct for the political parties and election candidates.

T20 WC starts

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wary of the West Indies who stunned them in the opening match of the 2003 World Cup in Cape Town, a defeat that cost the hosts a place in the second round.

West Indian star Marlon Samuels did not hesitate to remind the South Africans of that day and hoped his team will pull off a similar win at the Wanderers on Tuesday. "Hope we can do something like that again," said Samuels. "They (South Africa) are at home and have the advantage, but we are playing very good Twenty20 cricket."

South Africa, who have not won the 50-overs-a-side World Cup in five attempts despite being a formidable side, are determined to bag the Twenty20 world title in front of their own fans.

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 off 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 the belief 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 a 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.

"Battling second it's much easier to pace your innings. It's a matter of keeping wickets in hand and making sure that you reach your targets after every five overs. "If you bat first you have to sum up the conditions and adjust. That takes time and you don't have time in this format of the game."

In other words, winning the toss can be crucial. It's a game of chance.

The 27-match, 14-day tournament features the nine nations currently playing Test cricket along with Zimbabwe, Kenya and Scotland.

The 12 teams have been divided into four groups for the preliminary league with the top two from each group advancing to the Super Eights round. The final will be played on September 24.

US Open

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7-6, 7-6, 6-4 after denying the Slam final debutante on five set-point chances in the first set and two more in the second, having been a break down in each set.

"I played well when I had too," Federer said. "I've played better matches no doubt. A big moment. A lot of pressure for both of us. He made it hard for me in the beginning. All in all, I'm happy with my performance."

Federer, 26, matched Roy Emerson for second on the career Slam title list behind Sampras, surpassing 11-time Slam winners Bjorn Borg and Rod Laver and moving closer to beating Sampras - a goal that more and more occupies his mind.

Shaking off a case of nerves, Federer took advantage of his record 10th Slam final in a row to improve to 12-2 in Slam finals, winning three Slams in a year for the third time in four years, losing only the 2006 and 2007 French Opens.

Third seed Djokovic netted a backhand volley to surrender the only break of the last set on

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 Muktiyoddha 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 (ret'd.) 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 through unhindered, constructive dialogue."

Warmly welcoming the chief adviser's speech, the British high commission in Dhaka said it is an important step towards restoration of full democratic process in the country.

"We warmly welcome the Chief Adviser's speech. We support the restoration of full democratic processes and believe that lifting the ban on indoor political activities is an important step."

"We also welcome other announcements, including the possibility of holding the elections earlier than December 2008. This demonstrates the Caretaker Government's continuing commitment to the roadmap. We are pleased to see the progress made on the Photo Voter List -- this bodes well for the future."

The European Union heads of mission in Dhaka in a statement welcomed the chief adviser's announcement of the relaxation of limitations on certain form of political activities.

"EU Heads of Mission note that the full participation of political parties is indispensable to the electoral and political reform process and trust that this will constitute an important step towards the full restoration of civil and political rights as soon as possible."

The EU heads of mission also welcomed the possibility of elections being held before December 2008 as a demonstration of the caretaker government's commitment to the election roadmap.

Selecting party

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demanded that the EC communicate with them for holding talks on electoral reforms.

Asked which faction will be invited to attend the EC's talks on electoral reforms, the CEC said the EC has yet to decide the matter.

"A lot of time remains before holding talks with the BNP. Many things may happen by this time," the CEC said, adding, "So, we are not concerned about possible split in the political parties."

The much-talked dialogue between the EC and political parties on electoral reforms is set to begin from tomorrow. On the first day, the Islami Oikya Jote is scheduled to join the talks.

The BNP and Awami League, two major political parties of the country, are scheduled for talks in November.

The EC however will have to decide which faction of BNP will be invited for the upcoming talks with the parties if the ongoing crisis in BNP persists.

CEC Huda, who on several occasions from April 4 has asked for lifting the ban or at least relaxing the restrictions on indoor politics so that the EC can hold talks with the parties, yesterday expressed his satisfaction over the government decision to relax the ban on indoor politics and termed it timely and proper.

"We are now more confident of completing our tasks on time. We can now see our destination," Huda said.

About the chief adviser's remark on holding the stalled parliamentary election earlier than the set time of December 2008, the CEC said, "The parliamentary election can be held in October or November in 2008, if the task for preparing the voter list is completed earlier than the scheduled time."

According to the EC's roadmap the voter list with photographs will be ready in October 2008.

The two other election commissioners, Muhammed Sohul Hussain and Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain lauded the government decision about relaxing the restrictions on indoor politics.

Pakistan sends

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Ijaz-ul Haq told AFP.

"The Saudis have openly demanded his return to Saudi Arabia. He has not only embarrassed Pakistan but also the leadership of Saudi Arabia by violating the agreement," he said.

Sharif had agreed to remain in Saudi Arabia until 2010 as part of a deal that saw him released from prison, where he was locked up on corruption charges soon after Musharraf's coup.

The deportation defied Pakistan's increasingly independent Supreme Court, which has been sparring with the president and last month ordered the government not to hinder Sharif's homecoming.

The European Union urged the Pakistani government to respect the ruling, adding that Sharif should have the chance to defend himself in a Pakistani court.

Sharif had arrived earlier on a Pakistan International Airlines flight from London. He shook people's hands and his supporters on board the jet chanted "Go, Musharraf! Go!" and "Long live Nawaz Sharif", a passenger told AFP.

"After negotiations he accepted an offer to go back and returned in a special plane to Jeddah," a senior government official told AFP.

"He came to the VIP lounge and he was shown the arrest warrants. He was also shown the agreement that he has made with the Saudi government to remain out of the country for 10 years," the official said.

Baton-wielding police clashed with around 100 of Sharif's supporters and arrested key members of his party as he returned, while security forces threw up a five-kilometre (three-mile) security cordon around Islamabad airport.

Another five Sharif supporters were injured in an exchange of fire with police in northwest Pakistan, police said.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party condemned his deportation and filed a legal challenge in the Supreme Court, saying the government was in contempt of court.

US marks 9/11 under

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moment that the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, crashed into the North Tower.

Relatives of those killed will then be able to descend a long ramp into the World Trade Centre site to lay flowers and pause momentarily.

The ceremony is a lower profile event than the commemorations last year to mark the fifth anniversary of the attacks, when President George W. Bush laid a wreath at the site and later made a televised address to the nation.

Bush, who this year called for Americans to mark the attacks with memorial services and candlelight vigils, was to attend a remembrance service in Washington and later observe a moment of silence at the White House.

"The main problem is to fight extremism, to recognise that history has called us into action," Bush said last month, maintaining a line he has held since the attacks.

"By fighting extremists and radicals, we help people realise dreams. And helping people realize dreams helps promote peace," he added.

At Ground Zero, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg is to lead the ceremony, at which his predecessor, Republican presidential hopeful Rudolph Giuliani, will also deliver a reading.

Some of the relatives of those killed in the attacks have criticized Giuliani's attendance, especially given his presidential ambitions.

Giuliani has made much of his role as mayor in the aftermath of the attacks, but firefighters especially have criticized the city's response to the disaster and accused Giuliani of making political capital out of the attacks.

Democratic presidential frontrunner Hillary Clinton, a New York senator, is also due to take part in the ceremony, at which she will help read the names of the dead.

In the evening, a "Tribute in Light" is to project two massive beams of light into the night sky above Ground Zero to symbolise the collapsed towers.

In Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where hijackers brought down United Airlines Flight 93 in a remote field, tributes were to be held Tuesday to honour the 40 passengers and crew killed.

In Washington, where 184 people were killed when American Airlines Flight 77 flew into the Pentagon, the Defence Department was organising a Freedom Walk on Sunday to honour the dead and show support for US troops serving abroad.

More than 4,100 US troops have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan since Bush declared a "war on terror" in the aftermath of the attacks.

His popularity has plummeted since he stood in the ruins of the World Trade Centre with a bullhorn six years ago to

"I believe that the Saudi government has also interfered in Pakistan's internal affairs and shown disrespect to the constitution and the Supreme Court," party spokesman Siddique-ul Farooq told AFP.

Sharif said before his flight left London that it was time for president-in-uniform Musharraf to go.

"I am going back to my country with the resolve to rid my motherland of problems and lawlessness it is plunged into because of the policies of one man -- General Pervez Musharraf," he told Pakistan television.

After being ousted in 1999, Sharif was sentenced to life in prison for tax evasion and treason but was released in December 2000 on condition that he and his family live in exile in Saudi Arabia for 10 years.

The Supreme Court ruled last month that they could fly back. The court has repeatedly proved to be a thorn in the side of Musharraf since he tried to sack its chief judge, Iftekhar Muhammad Chaudhry, earlier this year.

That bid set off the protests, which spiralled into a full-blown political crisis for Musharraf, who has recently been negotiating a power-sharing deal with another former prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, to try to stay in office.

Benazir has said she will announce a date for her own return on Friday.

Musharraf has also faced growing criticism from the United States, which has taken him to task over Taliban and al-Qaeda militants operating on Pakistani soil and urging him to make good on pending elections.

Jail code

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"Oral communication does not mean telephone facility," he said, adding that it can be done through meeting.

Shamsul Haider informed that Sheikh Hasina had also personally requested him to provide her telephone facility in the jail. He told her that the rule does not permit it.

rally the American people.

Public dissatisfaction lies mainly in the war in Iraq and concern over whether the United States is safer now than it was six years ago, when fugitive al-Qaeda leader Bin Laden launched the attacks.

The militant