

BNP, AL helped each

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taken any action against the leaders now detained in jails, no one would have imagined their present state," said Moeen, vowing that no one who has resorted to corruption will be spared.

He said the ongoing anti-corruption drive was not aimed at any certain quarter or political party, but the whole initiatives have been taken in the interest of the country and the nation.

The army chief explained to the Bangladeshi expatriates the present situation of the country, the role of the caretaker government and the armed forces, drafting of the voter roll and national identity card, and electoral roadmap. He urged all to be united as Bangladesh under "one flag, one country and one spirit of nation".

Moeen said the main goal of the present government is to free the country of corruption as much as possible as it destroyed the country's democracy.

Bangladesh Ambassador to the United States M. Humayun Kabir delivered the welcome speech at the gathering while president of Probashi Nagarik Committee Mahadeb Sarkar greeted the army chief.

Earlier, the Bangladesh ambassador welcomed Moeen who arrived at the John F Kennedy International Airport from London.

"Many people pose questions, including 'Where are the leaders in Bangladesh? Under whose leadership will the country run?' I say there are leaders who are honest and accountable to the nation. They must be brought to the fore. I do not think that there is leadership crisis in the country," Moeen told the gathering.

He said there is no controversy about Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Rahman and late president Ziaur Rahman. They are our national heroes. It has already been decided that textbooks will have articles on the national heroes, he added.

The army chief said all know about the state of the country before January 11. The world was surprised to see the happenings in Bangladesh on October 28. "We had never seen even killing of a beast in a way human beings were killed on the streets," he said, adding that although a caretaker government was there at that time, it had rather intensified the

Oli finds no reason

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political party could offer proposals to his party, which is not new in political culture. "If any proposal comes, we will decide on it after a thorough examination and consultation in our party presidium and the executive committee," he said.

During the hour-long interview, Col Oli spoke candidly about party reforms, ban on politics and lifting of the state of emergency, expatriate voters and anti-corruption drive in the interim period.

Asked about Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's moves for reforms in BNP, he recounted that the LGRD Ministry headed by Bhuiyan, as its minister, was dubbed the most corrupt ministry during the five-year rule of the BNP government.

"A question lured in people's minds as to how a ministry could be so corrupt if its minister was not corrupt," he said, trying to underpin his observations about his former party colleague.

Oli observed that Bhuiyan, expelled from BNP, had been BNP secretary general for the longest time, nearly 12 years, and was the hardcore supporter of BNP chief Khaleda Zia.

He said, "The Prime Minister's Office, Hawa Bana and BNP office were controlled by Bhuiyan controls."

"When we spoke against corruption and terrorism in the last four years, Bhuiyan and his colleagues kept mum, being blinded by power and being busy enjoying bread and butter," he said.

Carrying on his tirade against the immediate-past ruling party affairs, Oli said, "Once Bhuiyan faithfully carried out Khaleda Zia's instructions. Now suddenly he became revolutionary. Such an opportunist leader who can betray his party cannot be trusted."

The LDP leader said most corrupt persons are facing trial and punishment, but he reminded that a few corrupt ones are trying to hide by giving lip service to reforms. "Do not call them reformists, they are opportunists. The government must take action against them."

Oli believes that if the Anti-corruption Commission is allowed to function freely, the level of corruption in the country would come down to the lowest level in next two to three years.

Asked about Bikalpa Dhara President Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury's proposition on national consensus government, he said a party that would secure majority seats through next parliamentary elections should decide when the country would be ruled.

"It does not depend on any one's wish to fulfil one's personal ambition," he said, taking a swipe at his another former party colleague.

Oli, however, noted that it would be good for the country if there were consensus on important

problems.

Law and order situation broke down and none was caring about the law, said Moeen, adding that political killings were normal at that time. The law and order was restored as soon as the present caretaker government assumed office, he said.

He said the country witnessed 34 political killings on an average each month, which has now come to zero.

The army chief said the country had three options: to go for the January 22 elections, to proclaim martial law, and to protect the national existence through establishment of an acceptable caretaker government by quickly promulgating the state of emergency.

Moeen said the world and the people of Bangladesh thought martial law was imminent. "But we decided not to follow the footsteps of our predecessors and adopted the third option," he said.

He said there was a plan to destroy the country's garment industries in 2006, but they failed it successfully.

The Chittagong port became inoperative but was made fully operational after some trouble makers were arrested, said Moeen, adding that the current efficiency of the port has increased by 40 percent while the cost has reduced by 30 percent.

The army chief said setting up of an effective Election Commission (EC) and an independent Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) and Public Service Commission (PSC) is the major success of the present caretaker government.

Describing the now-defunct Bureau of Anti-Corruption as a centre of corruption itself, Moeen said the ACC has been doing an excellent job in checking corruption. He said the ACC has filed hundreds of corruption cases and 24 persons have so far been convicted.

The EC is preparing the voter identity cards—one of the first steps towards development in modern Bangladesh—with the help of the army. Moeen said already 25 lakh voter ID cards have been prepared.

He said the task of voters' registration will start in full swing from November and will end by July next year. A total of nine crore people will be given voter ID cards and no one will be able to raise questions about its acceptability and transparency since restoring democracy is the biggest challenge at present.

Thousands of Hindu devotees will throng the Dhaka Ramakrishna Mission where the Puja will start at 11:00 am worshipping a six-year-old girl as the image of the goddess.

A girl aged between six and 12, who symbolises the virgin form of the goddess, is worshipped in front of the idol of Durga.

Kumari Puja is held either on Mahashamti or Mahanabami. This year, it will be celebrated on Mahashamti.

According to Hindu scriptures, Kumari Puja commemorates the killing of Kolasur by goddess Mahakali. Kolasur had occupied the heaven and the earth. When the helpless deities approached Mahakali for help, she was born again in the form of maiden Durga and killed Kolasur.

Devotional songs, dance and aratrika will be performed at different Puja Mandaps. Besides, Sandhi Puja will be celebrated from 8:57 pm to 9:45 pm across the country.

Meanwhile, leaders of different political, social and cultural organisations, civil society members, diplomats and top officials yesterday visited Puja Mandaps at Dhakeshwari temple, Jagannath Hall temple, Ramkrishna Mission, Kalabagan Puja Mandap, Tantibazar, Shankhari Bazar and Banglabazar to greet the Hindu devotees.

Awami League (AL) leaders led by Mati Chowdhury distributed clothes among poor people, said Shree Shree Ramshita Mandir Committee in a press release yesterday.

Criticising the Election Commission's (EC) move to register Bangladeshi expatriates in the UK as voters, he asked why the EC did not think of the other 20 lakh working in middle-east countries. He said making the expatriates one country voters and depriving 70 percent others living in other countries would be contrary to the existing laws.

As a matter of fact, he said, 60 percent development works in the country are done with the remittances sent by these people.

Oli said instead of giving voter ID cards to the expatriates, their passports could be recognised as ID cards. This will reduce the cost of the EC and reduce the burden of frequent foreign trips by EC officials.

Asked about the government's new strategy to punish corrupt business instead of throwing them into jail, Oli said the way the law is being applied against corrupt politicians should not be applied against corrupt business men for the sake of the national economy.

"But it must be looked into whether the business men are siphoning off money, depriving the government of taxes and their money is invested in the country."

Asked about the immediate-past ruling party affairs, Oli said, "Once Bhuiyan faithfully carried out Khaleda Zia's instructions. Now suddenly he became revolutionary. Such an opportunist leader who can betray his party cannot be trusted."

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EC pours cold water

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Moeen said the PSC was a place of corruption for recruiting government officials. But now it is free of corruption.

Referring to hundreds of crores of smuggled money, the army chief said procedures to bring back the money is going on expeditiously. "Already \$12 million have been brought back to the country and another \$72 million is in the pipeline for reimbursement while the process to recover another \$240 million is going on," said Moeen.

Replies to a query, he said the EC is considering banning activities of the political parties abroad and has already notified the parties in this regard.

Moeen said the country will not go back to the pre-January 11 situation. He said the decision to establish an independent human rights commission has already been taken and the National Security Council will be formed if required.

Asked why leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami have not been arrested, Moeen said the government does not have any discriminatory attitude regarding corruption suspects.

"Out of the 222 suspected corrupt, there are some Jamaat leaders too. So, it is not right that Jamaat leaders have been spared," the army chief said, adding that they have no plan to publish more lists of corruption suspects.

During his visit to the US, Moeen will call on the president of the United Nations General Assembly and Congressman Joseph A. Crowley and exchange views with the journalists and Bangladeshi expatriates in Florida. He will also present a paper at a seminar at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.

Kumari Puja

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