

Kyrgyz leaders 'have blood on their hands'

Says ousted president

AFP, Jalalabad, Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan's ousted but defiant President Kurmanbek Bakiyev told AFP Friday he had no intention of resigning and accused the country's new self-proclaimed leadership of causing many deaths this week.

Speaking in an exclusive interview with AFP in the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalalabad, Bakiyev, 60, said he did not give any order for security forces to open fire on protesters in Bishkek this week, where at least 76 people died.

The ousted president also said that neither Russia nor the United States, both of which maintain military facilities in the strategic ex-Soviet Central Asian republic, played any role in the upheaval there this week. "I am not the one with blood on my hands," said Bakiyev, speaking confidently and appearing tired but relaxed in a blue pin-striped suit with an open collar at a house in Jalalabad. AFP's meeting with Bakiyev provided the first independent confirmation of his whereabouts after he was forced to flee the capital Bishkek on Wednesday when protesters overwhelmed security forces and stormed government buildings.

"Those people who organised armed men to storm the White House have blood on their hands. It's the opposition whose hands are bloody," Bakiyev said.

S Sudan votes for first time in a generation

AP, Juba, Sudan

The election posters and slogan-filled T-shirts blanketing this town underscore a new excitement in Southern Sudan, which will cast ballots in a national election for the first time in more than two decades, when a three-day election begins Sunday.

Despite the first-in-a-generation vote, though, most people are already looking past the weekend ballot to a vote in January considered far more significant: a referendum on independence that could signal the birth of a new African nation, if final negotiations with Khartoum over oil rights and the location of the border are worked out peacefully.

"Southerners are going to vote for independence. We cannot say if they (Khartoum) will accept it," said Peter Yien, a 28-year-old who lives in Akobo, a southeastern town on the border with Ethiopia that is suffering a severe food shortage because of tribal conflict and a lack of rain.

The roots of a young democracy have taken place this election cycle, at least in the south's capital of Juba, which has seen candidate rallies, voter education drives and political speeches for the

Arson attack

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visited the spot and assured the victims that the criminals would be punished.

Strangely, the fire service said the fire might have originated from an electric short circuit.

Talking to The Daily Star Quamrul Islam said a number of ruling party men were allegedly involved in the attack.

"During my spot visit, I received several names of people who were involved in the violence and I already directed police to arrest them within 24 hours," the state minister said.

He said he does not know why the attack was made.

Additional Deputy Commissioner AHM Kamruzzaman of Lalbagh zone told The Daily Star local criminals made the attack.

Habibur Rahman, one of the owners of the land where the incident took place, last night filed a case against 12 locals and around 90 unidentified people for the attack.

"The cadres looted the cashboxes, valuables and set

Embassy

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information from a foreign embassy, the government issued red alert in the airport area and beefed up security measurers in and around the airport.

"We had remained alert so that none can carry any arms and ammunition in the airport", said the minister while talking to reporters at the Circuit House of the district.

But there is no such apprehension and we are safe now, he added.

GM Quader, also a presidium member of AL's ally Jatiya Party said his party supports the government's move to try the war criminals of 1971.

SECURITY BEEFED UP IN CITGOO

The authorities in Chittagong yesterday beefed up security at the airport, key point installations and important establishments to check possible acts of sabotage ahead of war crime trial and Pahela Baishakh, reports BSS.

Chittagong Metropolitan Police (CMP) sources said the law enforcement agencies including CMP and the Rapid Action Battalion have undertaken tight security measures to avert untoward incidents and destructive activities by militants.

The members of the concerned agencies have been put on maximum alert with deployment of increased number of forces.

Intelligence surveillance has been enhanced at Chittagong Shah Amanat International Airport (CSAIA), three main oil depots, T&T and PDB buildings, Eastern Refinery, centres of Bangladesh Betar, and Bangladesh Television.

Ohidul Hoq, officer-in-charge of CSAIA immigration, said adequate number of law enforcers including plainclothes police have been deployed at the airport. Jahangir Alam, assistant commissioner of Detective Branch (DB) of police, said they have deputed sufficient number of police personnel in the entire Chittagong and would set up checkposts in different strategic points of the metropolis.

Rab would enhance vigilance in Chittagong, Cox's Bazaar, Feni and Comilla cities while over 900 policemen would be deployed at important places including upazila headquarters to maintain law and order ahead of Pahela Baishakh, sources said.

AL plans

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Currently the ruling party central leaders in 15 teams are holding extended meetings at different districts of the country focusing on the government's success and making people aware of the conspiracies and propaganda by the BNP-led opposition against the government in the wake of its move to try war criminals.

River erosion

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According to their recent prediction, the Jamuna this year will erode about 95 kilometres of riverbank at six points in Kurigram, four each in Gaibandha, Bogra, Sirajganj and Jamalpur, two in Pabna and one each in Tangail and Manikganj.

About 1,150 hectares of land and settlements in an area of 306 hectares are vulnerable to erosion this year.

River erosion might damage flood embankments in four locations and there is 50 percent probability that the embankments will be breached there.

The Padma might cause erosion at one point in Nawabganj, two in Rajshahi, four in Kushtia, one each in Pabna, Rajbari, and Faridpur and two in Shariatpur.

The two mighty rivers last year eroded about 1,932 hectares of land, settlements over an area of 273 hectares, and 60 metres of embankment and 6,200 metres of roads, the report said.

At least 17 educational institutions, 14 mosques, four government offices and two markets were also lost to them at the same time.

Woman, son

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"They released my son two hours after we gave them Tk 7,000 and a mobile phone set worth Tk 20,000. They threatened us with dire consequences if we disclose it to anyone," she said.

Reena said they did not inform police about the event. But some of their neighbours came to know about the incident and told some of the criminals' family members about it.

"It infuriated the criminals. They attacked our house and looted a gold chain, a mobile phone set and other valuables," she said.

Reena said they first exploded a bomb targeting Faisal and then another as she tried to stop them.

BCL's business

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DU Treasurer Prof Mijanur Rahman said, "These billboards are illegal as the contracts with advertising companies have been cancelled. We had requested them to remove the billboards but they did not respond."

He said the administration could not demolish the billboards on its own due to lack of technical support.

Under a five-year deed, the DU authorities allocated Bashundhara Communication spaces for eight hoardings--one near Milon Chatter, five near Doel Chatter and one each near Medicine Corner and Nilkhet Police box--on November 11, 2003.

The contract was cancelled on December 15, 2007 and on the very day the DU authorities sent a letter to Bashundhara Communication asking them to remove the billboards.

Of the four other billboards, two at Milon Chatter were allocated to Bangladesh Publicity and Golden Ad while two near Nilkhet to SF International Trade Link and Neptune Ad. All their contacts have been cancelled between October 2007 and January 2008.

DU earned about Tk 16 lakh before the contracts were cancelled.

On November 19, 2009, the DU authorities again sent

letters to the companies giving them 15 days' time to remove the hoardings.

BCL DU unit president Sohel Rana Tipu said, "I know that some people are involved with the business. We requested the university administration several times to pull down the illegal hoardings to put an end to this illegal business."

Security officials said BCL leaders have been controlling the billboard business since the Awami League-led grand alliance assumed power early last year.

A DU unit BCL leader who enjoys a share of the business money said the BCL leaders contact the advertising firms and collect advertisements. "Whenever we go to tear off the advertisements, BCL leaders resist and threaten us. One of the leaders even threatened to shoot me when I went to pull off an advertisement near Milon Chatter," said a campus security officer requesting anonymity.

DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique said they have sent a letter to Dhaka City Corporation asking them to demolish the illegal billboards.

"If the DCC authorities do not respond, the engineering department of the university will pull down the hoardings," he added.

Rooftop hoardings

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Owners' Association (OAOA) is disposed of.

Sultana Kamal, a human rights activist and executive director of the legal aid group Ain O Salish Kendra, said the 2007 stay order has rendered the recent directive almost ineffective. The court should have noticed it.

"It is an example of lack of coordination that we work with and how risky it is for public life," she said.

DCC Executive Magistrate Khalil Ahmed said they would not demolish the rooftop hoardings until the writ is disposed of. "We will dismantle only those illegally set up on roadsides and take action against the buildings," he said.

Taking full advantage of the earlier HC stay order, advertising companies have been going on with setting up such hoardings for two and a half years without paying tax.

Though Rajuk and the DCC have no exact estimate of how many illegal hoardings are on rooftops, Rajuk official sources claimed that there are at least 4,000 rooftop hoardings.

The Rajuk authorised officer of zone-1 (Dhanmondi, Lalmatia, Panthapath, Green Road, Manupuri Para, Sutrapur) carried out a survey in 2007 in his area and identified 600 illegal rooftop hoardings.

"At least 90 percent of the illegal hoardings are installed on rooftops," said DCC Chief Town Planner Sirajul Islam. The DCC approved only a small number of rooftop billboards in the past and those too are now illegal as the owners have not renewed the approval in the last two years, said Sirajul.

"It means none of the rooftop hoardings are authorised nor has the government received tax for them," he said. The number of DCC-authorized outdoor advertisement installations is just 846, including 294 on DCC-owned land, 200 on private land and 352 mega signs on central reservations of road.

Interestingly, neither Rajuk nor the DCC has made any effective move so far to vacate the 2007 HC stay order even though the matter is of grave concern. A number of officials concerned at Rajuk and the

Panchagarh

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clash between BCL and Jubo League men over submission of bid documents in Panchagarh on Thursday.

In an overnight drive, police arrested Liton, 24, and Anisur Rahman, 20, from Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital while they were undergoing treatment for the injuries they received during the clash.

Officer-in-Charge of Panchagarh Police Station Jamiruddin said Liton was the main suspect in the killing.

However, police arrested Mizanur Rahman Manju, 28, Mohsin, 32, and Mostafizur Rahman, 28, from different places of Panchagarh.

The arrested persons were produced before the Chief Judicial Magistrate court yesterday.

Of the five arrestees, Liton, Manju and Mohsin are Jubo League activists while the others from Sramik League.

DCC are unaware of the case.

The relevant file at Rajuk's law section is missing. It, however, has a document number "319/2007".

"I'm not aware of the case," said Rajuk Law Officer Muhammad Salehuddin after The Daily Star asked about the case.

Rajuk lawyer Shahed Ali was assigned with the case on February 14, 2008. Shahed said the court wanted to dismiss the case but the petitioner prevented it. It has been out of the cause list ever since.

DCC Law Officer MS Karim Khan said the rule was scheduled for final hearing at court on October 20, 2008 but it was removed from the cause list that day.

"We could not bring it on the list despite repeated attempts," he said.

Renting out building rooftops for unauthorised use with any kind of structures is a violation of Building Construction Act, said Rajuk officials.

"We do not have any mechanism to approve installation of hoardings on rooftops, and therefore, any such structure is unauthorised," said Rajuk Director (development control) Sheikh Abdul Mannan.

As to why they do not take legal action against those building owners, Mannan said, "It is our failure."

Lawyer Manzill Murshid, who appeared for the petitioner to obtain the March 22, 2010, HC order, said, "We will take initiative to vacate the 2007 stay order."

Two people were killed and eight others were injured when a loosely mounted hoarding on Gulshan Shopping Centre at Gulshan-1 collapsed on them on March 15.

A security guard Hazrat Ali was killed on June 17, 2006 on Pragati Sarani in a similar incident. A hoarding crushed a young man to death near Zia International Airport on May 6, 2009.

BCL rampage

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submit its report within a very short time. Two other members are Prof Mahbubur Rahman, director of the Institute of Bangladesh Studies, and Prof Abdul Latif of psychology department.

Meanwhile, 301 RU teachers under the banner of Progressive Teachers Society (PTS), in a joint statement yesterday demanded immediate punishment of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) cadres who beat up proctor and his two assistants, a hall provost and two house tutors on Wednesday night.

Expressing deep concern over the incident, the teachers demanded justice in the interest of smooth running of educational institutions as well as the country.

The signatories included its RU unit convener Prof Shah Nowaz Ali, Prof Moklesur Rahman, Prof Rustom Ali, Prof Mizan Uddin, Prof Ananda Kumar Saha, Prof Jalal Uddin, Prof Shamsuddin Elias and Prof Soharab Ali.

Meanwhile, Provost Council, an association of provosts of 16 RU halls, decided to observe one-day work abstention today demanding punishment of the attackers.

2001 Post-poll

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In the mean time, it received over 1,000 allegations in writing from the victims.

The present Prime Minister and AL President Sheikh Hasina had directed her party leaders and workers to file allegations with the probe commission.

The commission will exchange views with cross sections of people, both victims and witnesses.

Its members will also talk to people of different socio-cultural, political and human rights organisations for information and evidence. The local administration will assist the commission.

On April 11, the commission members will record statements of victims at Barisal Circuit House and then visit the places of occurrence.

"We will investigate who after the 2001 elections committed the violence and how and look into the progress of the cases filed in connection with the incidents," said commission member Mir Shahidul Islam, also additional deputy inspector general of police now posted in the Criminal Investigation Department.

Upon completing the task, the commission will submit reports to the government with recommendations for taking legal actions against the culprits.

Talking to The Daily Star, Shahidul Islam said besides over 1,000 allegations already filed they received many allegations over telephone while several hundred people came to the commission in person to lodge complaints.

According to the 2003 report of United Nations High Commission for Refugees, an unknown number of Hindus and members of other religious minority communities in Bangladesh either remained internally displaced or sought asylum in India as a result of post-election violence.

Foil plot

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the capital. Dhaka city unit of AL-led 14-party combine organised the rally to whip up support for the trials of war criminals.

Income sources of war criminals must be cut off, he said adding that those who say the trials of war criminals should be held after resolving power and water crises do not really want the trials.

Meanwhile, the main opposition BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said none would accept the trials of war crimes if it is done only to harass the opposition.

Addressing a programme at BNP central office at Nayapaltna, he alleged that there are war criminals within the ruling party. He demanded that the government publish their names.

Minister asks

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refrain from tender manipulation. Stern actions will be taken against those responsible for creating unrest during any bidding process," he said.

"The party men must have to achieve the credibility among the people through their works," the minister told the meeting.

About war crimes, Khandaker said, "The government is determined to hold the trials of war criminals. The party workers must remain alert for that."

President of Sujanagar upazila unit AL Abul Kashem chaired the meeting.

Earlier the planning minister distributed drum sets to the scout members of 72 schools in the upazila and awarded scholarship to the poor students.

BSF releases

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pillar no 92. The BSF men took Saiful into Indian territory and tortured him mercilessly, sources said.

Soon after the incident, BDR sent a letter to BSF protesting the incident.

BSF set Saiful free near the border around 6:30pm. He is now undergoing treatment at Damurdaha upazila health complex.

Major Humayun Kabir, deputy commander of the rifle battalion, told the newsman that BSF has agreed to sit with BDR regarding the incident.

Earlier on March 2, BSF abducted another farmer Fazlul Haq from the same area and later released him after torture.

Fazlul, 22, of Charulia village of the upazila, died at a hospital in Dhaka on March 12.

Ruling party wins

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Rajapakse's spokesman Chandepala Liyanage said.

"The party has won parliament very comfortably," Liyanage told AFP, predicting that it would secure at least 24 of the undeclared seats, leaving it just nine seats short of a two-thirds majority.

"No party has ever got this much," he added.

Thursday's vote was the first parliamentary ballot since government forces defeated Tamil Tiger rebels in May, leading to a surge in Rajapakse's popularity.

But it was marked by a record low turnout and numerous cases of voter intimidation that resulted in fresh voting being ordered in two of the island's 22 electoral districts.

The re-poll means 16 seats will only be declared on April 19, along with another 29 that are distributed on a proportional representation system.

The widely expected victory will further strengthen Rajapakse's grip on power just three months after he won a second term as president by an emphatic margin.

His main political rival, former army chief Sarath Fonseka, contested Thursday's poll from behind bars but his party secured just five seats.

Fonseka was arrested just weeks after the presidential vote and is facing court martial.

The main Tamil National Alliance won 12 seats.

Rajapakse had been hoping for a two-thirds majority that would allow him to tinker with the constitution, which currently limits presidents to two successive terms.

"I want a very strong parliament to develop the country," he told reporters as he cast his ballot Thursday in a southern constituency where his son Namal was the ruling party candidate.

The opposition UNP was non-committal about the outcome.

"We are not challenging the legality of those who are elected," UNP spokesman

Tissa Attanayake told reporters. "But we must stress that there were serious violations in the run-up to the elections."

For many Sri Lankans, it was the first legislative poll in which they could vote without fear of Tamil Tiger violence and suicide attacks.

Analysts said the record low turnout of less than 55 percent would take the shine off the ruling party's victory.

"People have sent a message," said political analyst Victor Ivan. "They are fed up with politicians and their deception. That is why nearly half of the electorate did not bother to vote."

Human rights campaigner and political analyst Nimalka Fernando said the low turnout would undermine the new government's position.

"The result does not give moral authority to the government because half of the electorate did not vote," Fernando said. "With the legitimacy undermined, the government will not be able to go for any sweeping reforms."

Sethmini Chathurika, 28, said she had voted for Rajapakse's party because it had succeeded in ending the conflict with the Tamil Tigers.

"The president has plans to build the country. I think he deserves a parliament to implement those plans," Chathurika said.

Rajapakse's nationalistic rhetoric appeals to his majority Sinhalese community, but has been criticised by rights groups who accuse him of cronyism and suppressing dissent.

Opposition parties were largely united behind Fonseka in his campaign for the presidency in January, but lost cohesion after his arrest and went into the parliamentary election with little hope of victory.

"I hope the government uses the mandate of a stronger parliament to push investment-friendly reforms," said Srimal Abeyratne, head of the economics department at the University of Colombo.

Thai protesters

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down their shields and riot gear and shaking hands with the protesters. The Red Shirts offered water to soldiers and police.

The escalating demonstrations are part of a long-running battle between the mostly poor and rural supporters of former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, and the ruling elite they say orchestrated the 2006 military coup that removed him from power. They see the Oxford-educated Abhisit as a symbol of the elite and claim he took office illegitimately in December 2008 with the help of military pressure on Parliament.

In recent weeks, police at demonstrations have frequently shown sympathy with the protesters and analysts say the security forces, especially the police, are split in their loyalties, making it difficult for the government to enforce its orders and decrees.

Leaders of the Red Shirt movement initially said they would march to undisclosed locations across Bangkok on Friday in their biggest rally yet, but switched plans, with protest leader Nattawut Saikua telling followers, "We're all moving in one direction."

"We're going to bring back our People Channel," he said. Columns of protesters, riding motorcycles and pickup trucks, had blared horns and waved red flags as they moved out of their two main encampments in downtown Bangkok and headed north 28 miles (45 kilometres) to the offices of Thaicom in the suburb of Pathum Thani.

Thaicom was founded by Thaksin, a telecommunications tycoon turned politician.

The government security agency estimated that 15,000 people were in the motorized caravan, but army spokesman Col Sansern Kaewkamnerd placed the number at about 3,000. Both figures are far below the biggest estimated turnout of about 100,000 during the early days of the protests last month.

PTV was set up and financed by Red Shirt sympathizers. A number of small community radio stations also are allied with the protesters, who also use cell phones and social networking to communicate.

On Friday, the Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for three leaders for allegedly seizing the commercial district, the official Thai News Agency said. To date, a total of 27 warrants have been issued but none of the leaders is known to have been taken into custody.

The government has declared a state of emergency

but so far has exerted no significant force to stop the escalating demonstrations. Instead, it has censored the protesters' communication links. On Thursday, it blocked the "People Channel" and dozens of Web sites that broadcast the protesters' fiery rallies and calls to the countryside for reinforcements.

Abhisit imposed the emergency order Wednesday and canceled a one-day trip to Hanoi for a summit of Southeast Asian leaders as he searched for ways to resolve the showdown without the use of force.

The prime minister went on national television late Thursday to explain the reasons behind the censorship and to announce that arrest warrants had been issued for protest leaders accused of briefly storming Parliament on Wednesday.

"What the government wants is peace and happiness, Abhisit said. Although the emergency order means the military now has greater power to restore order, both Abhisit and the army know a crack-down could result in bloodshed that would be political poison.

"It is the manipulation of information that is creating hate," he said.

Government spokesman Panitan Wattanayagorn said the media outlets blocked put out false information, including warnings that Abhisit authorized the use of force against protesters.

Most of Thailand's television stations are owned by the government, but other media are privately owned and reflect a wide spectrum of political opinion.