PHOTO: AFP

Yemeni anti-government protesters show their palms calling for the ouster of Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh during a demonstration in the capital Sanaa yesterday.

Yemeni president urges opposition to end protest

2 killed, hundreds wounded in fresh clashes

REUTERS, *Sanaa*

Embattled Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh urged opposition yesterday to end protests demanding his departure, saying he was "willing" to discuss a peaceful transition of power.

Saleh called on the Common Forum opposition coalition to "end the crisis through calling off protests and removing roadblocks", in a meeting with representatives from the province of Taez.

"We are ready to discuss transferring power, but in peaceful and constitutional framework," he added to chants of "No concessions after today!"

His ruling party also said it had not received a proposed transition plan from opposition parties that envisages Saleh handing power to a vice president while steps are taken toward a national unity government and new elections.

"We haven't got it yet," an official said.

Saleh has received sustenance from the United States, which has talked openly of its concern over who might succeed a man they view as an ally who helped them contain al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, a Yemen-based wing of the militant group.

Meanwhile, two Yemenis died and hundreds were hurt yesterday when police used live rounds, tear gas and batons to try to break up protests.

The two dead were among around 10 people hit by bullets in the violence in Taiz, south of the capital, where doctors said dozens were wounded, and that they were treating hundreds suffering tear gas inhalation.

"Armored vehicles and tanks are surrounding us. They have spent three hours firing tear gas and bullets (in the air) in an effort to break up the protest," said activist Bushra al-Maqtari.

Weeks of protests inspired by uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia have brought Saleh's rule to the verge of collapse, but Saleh, a perennial survivor, has resisted the calls to jump.

At least 250 others were injured, some with live rounds, when police used tear gas and gunfire to disperse the protesters who were heading to the governorate headquarters.

Police continued to fire as security forces pushed back the demonstrators to a square where they have been holding a sit-in as part of nationwide protests demanding that Saleh end more than three decades in power, the witnesses added.

The opposition, which has led the more than two month old protests, called on the president on Saturday to hand over power to his deputy.

1 killed in clash with police

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Implementation Committee, headed by Chief of an Islami Oikya Jote faction Fazlul Haque Amini, called the hartal to protest the proposed National Women Development Policy 2011. The committee has demanded scrapping of the policy saying it goes against the tenets of the Qur'an.

The cabinet on March 7 approved the policy with a provision of women's equal share in property and their opportunity in employment and business.

However, State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury has said the policy is not a law and it contains nothing that might affect the inheritance laws.

Witnesses said madrasa students brought out a procession from the Railway Madrasa under the banner of Hefajat-e-Islam in the morning to drum up support for today's hartal, reports our correspondent in Benapole.

When police intercepted the procession near Zilla School intersection on Mujib Sarak at around 11:30am, the madrasa students attacked the law enforcers with sticks and pelted them with brickbats.

Police lobbed tear gas canisters to disperse them in vain. The law enforcers then fired shots at madrasa students leaving Ahmed Hussain, 19, student of Railway Madrasa and son of Ismail Hossain of Monirampur upazila, seriously injured, said witnesses.

Ahmed was taken to Jessore Sadar Hospital where he succumbed to his wounds at about 12:00noon.

However, Emdad Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, claimed the bullet that killed Ahmed was not fired by police. He said some protesters fired on the law enforcers during the clashes.

The police officer said they had to intercept the procession to maintain law and order in the town. The madrasa students did not take any permission from authorities concerned to bring out the procession, he said.

Emdad said police were compelled to fire shots into the air after the madrasa students attacked them and shot at the law enforcers.

Anwarul Karim, chairman of Hefajat-e-Islam and khatib of Karbala mosque, said the injured students were receiving treatment.

The injured policemen were admitted to the Sadar Hospital.

Meanwhile, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia in a statement condemned the firing on the pro-hartal procession.

Khaleda's Press Secretary Maruf Kamal Khan said the former premier heard about the incident on her arrival in Dhaka and offered condolence over the death of the madrasa student.

State Minister for Religious Affairs Md Shahjahan Mia urged the Islamist group to withdraw the hartal and sit with the government to discuss the women development policy.

The hartal was called to hamper the trial of war criminals, the minister told reporters at his secretariat office.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Benazir Ahmed said police would maintain security of people going about their daily chores in the capital.

"Action will be taken, if anyone tries to disrupt law and order," he said while talking to reporters at the DMP headquarters.

UN's Gaza war report 'should be buried': Israel

BBC ONLINE

Israel has called on the UN to cancel a report that said it possibly committed war crimes during its 2008-2009 military offensives in Gaza.

The report's author, South African judge Richard Goldstone, said on Friday that new accounts indicated Israel had not deliberately targeted civilians.

He said that if he had known what he knew now, "the Goldstone Report would have been a different document".

Israel's prime minister said the remark meant the report "should be buried".

Operation Cast Lead killed some 1,400 Palestinians, including hundreds of civilians, as well as 13 Israelis.

The Goldstone Report, published in September 2009, concluded that both the Israeli military and militants from the Palestinian Islamist movement Hamas, which controls Gaza, had committed potential war crimes and possible crimes against humanity during the offensive.

Stop land grabbers

FROM PAGE 1

She said that the present government is committed to maintaining the natural beauty of the tourist city of the country.

"During BNP-Jamaat government a section of people grabbed land here and built unauthorised structures that destroyed the beauty of the city."

She also asked the administration to go for forestation in the khash land for the sake of the environment. "The more you go for plantation the more land you will recover and the more you will be kept safe from natural disasters.''

In this connection she said that the present government will formulate a master plan for Cox's Bazar city.

Hasina directed the administration to prepare a good drainage system as the rain waters could easily flow down from the hills.

She also asked the concerned officials to prepare a list of the problems that they are facing due to the Rohingyas.

Earlier, the prime minister had a meeting with the district lawyers association. President of the lawyers association Advocate Shahabuddin presided over the meeting.

5 years not enough

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and general secretaries of all organisational districts and members of the central executive committee are present.

But, the tenure of the present committee was not extended.

Many leaders of the current committee are no longer students and have started work or their own businesses.

"The organisation is simply stagnant for the last few years as there is no democratic practice. Leaders are getting frustrated," a joint secretary of BCL told The Daily Star preferring not to be named.

The BCL constitution says the central executive committee should meet every two months but the present committee only met four or five times altogether, BCL leaders said.

"The central executive committee meetings are held only before organising programmes on different national days where the top leaders make decisions on their own without consulting other leaders," said the joint secretary of BCL.

"No one looks after Chhatra League now. It seems our leader Sheikh Hasina is also not interested in making the organisation functional. The present leaders do not want to step down as they are enjoying it. There is no sign of formation of a new committee which is very frustrating," another joint secretary of BCL said.

Talking to The Daily Star, BCL General Secretary Mahfuzul Haider Chowdhury Roton said they would take steps for forming a new committee after talking to the "party high command".

He, however, did not make it clear whether the "high command" he referred to was the ruling Awami League leaders.

"We have completed formation of around 60 unit committees and some more are pending. We will take steps to form a new committee once those committees are formed," Roton said.

When asked about the age limit of the leaders, he said, "I don't want to talk about the issue."

BCL President Mahmud Hasan Ripon said, "A fresh central committee will be elected very soon after holding a national council."

Hasina on Aminee's threat

FROM PAGE 1

else, who bestows honour to anyone. My question: How Aminee can say he will pull me down? Is he more powerful than Allah?"

The premier said that Aminee is often vocal about religion, but "he is the person who spread wrong conception about Islam, the religion of peace."

She said the Women Development Policy has been formulated "in the light of holy Quran and Hadith (Sunnah)."

"Awami League never goes against the holy Quran and Hadith, and will never do so," Hasina said.

Referring to Surah Nisa, Hasina further said that Allah established the rights of women on the property of husband and father. "But he (Aminee) is talking against the rights of the women."

She alleged that Mufti Aminee is engaged in non-religious activities in the name of religion.

Regarding the reported new technique of Aminee to picket during the hartal hours today with holy Quran in one hand, she said, "This is an outright contempt of the holy book. The present government won't tolerate any sort of contempt of the holy Quran."

Acting President of the district AL Ahmad Hossain presided over the rally while the central and local leaders of the party addressed it.

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