

Sarkozy

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voluntary organisation established to promote microcredit activities of Grameen Bank and its affiliates, circulated the contents of the letter published in the French press yesterday.

"Please allow me to reiterate, once again, how much your model of a "social business" bank, which has enabled poor people in your country to widely access credit, is admired and respected in France," Sarkozy wrote.

"This has actually done a lot for the prestige and reputation of Bangladesh across the globe: the world needs innovative projects to fight poverty and inequalities, and the creation of the Grameen Bank was an audacious initiative, which has been an ongoing source of inspiration for the international community," he said.

"I know the difficulties you are going through at the present moment. I trust the institutions of your country will find a fair resolution to these. The French government will closely monitor the situation and will definitely address the issue with Bangladeshi authorities over the next few days."

In the same letter, Sarkozy answered to Yunus' proposal to enlarge the composition of G20 group to allow more developing countries to participate in.

"Let me thank you for your proposal of enlarging the G20. As you know, I was in favour, as early as the first meeting of G20, of a broader opening to non-member countries, in particular those less economically advanced...With regards to your country, which you are warmly advocating for, we could consider having Bangladesh (together with other developing nations) participate in specific events organised by the G20 French Presidency, despite the fact we cannot extend an invitation to Cannes."

"I would be happy to welcome you personally to Paris again this year to continue the work of the G20 French Presidency on the issue of poverty and social exclusion, before the Cannes Summit of November 3-4," Sarkozy added.

PRODI FOR AMICABLE SOLUTION

Romano Prodi, former president of European Commission, has written to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, expressing hope she would be able to reach an amicable solution to Prof Muhammad Yunus issue.

In the letter, 71-year-old Prodi voiced support for the Nobel laureate and his visionary work in eradicating poverty from the country, reads a statement of the Grameen Bank.

The letter from the two-time former prime minister of Italy came as several governments including France and Spain have expressed concern about Yunus' removal by Bangladesh Bank from the position of Grameen Bank managing director.

Prodi said along with dedicated institutions like Grameen Bank and a visionary person like Yunus, the prime minister can definitely wipe out poverty from Bangladesh and set examples for the developing world.

He hoped the prime minister's intervention will lead to a solution and Bangladesh will move forward as a prosperous country, according to the statement.

War crimes

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suspects under the custody of the investigation agency at a Dhanmondi house in the capital.

They said the government allocated the house (No 405 (old) and 20/A (new) at Dhanmondi Road 27) as a safe place for keeping Nizami and Mojahid in it during interrogation, and has issued a gazette notification in this regard.

Defence counsel Tajul Islam and Munshi Ahsan Kabir opposed the prayer terming the house insecure for their clients.

They added that there is no need for questioning the two.

Yunus loses plea

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directors against the HC ruling.

It was not immediately known on what grounds the apex court dismissed Yunus' appeal.

Yunus, who was not in the court yesterday, told the staff at Grameen Bank headquarters that he respects the SC order.

"It's time for you to work with greater dedication to keep this institution effective," he told around 300 staff members who gathered on the ground floor of the Grameen office at Mirpur in the capital. "You must not let this institution slide down."

Meanwhile, Grameen Chairman Khondaker Muzammel Huq told The Daily Star that he will call a meeting of the board of directors after receiving a certified copy of the court's order from Bangladesh Bank.

The ruling yesterday capped a month-long dispute between Yunus and the government over the right of the "banker to the poor" to continue as managing director of the bank.

Last month, the central bank removed 71-year-old Yunus from the post, saying he violated the bank's retirement regulation that requires an official to stand down at 60.

Yunus said his dismissal was illegal and that the government was trying to take control of the bank, which pioneered microlending to the poor to alleviate poverty.

His legal battle has caused concern worldwide and threatened to dampen ties between Bangladesh and the United States.

Robert Blake, US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs, met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, government and opposition leaders and Yunus during a trip to Bangladesh last month.

He told reporters the US was "deeply troubled" by the developments and called for a compromise. He said if no compromise was reached, "I think it will have an effect on our bilateral relations."

A US embassy spokesperson in Dhaka yesterday said, "We remain concerned and hopeful that a compromise can be reached."

"We appreciate the efforts being made to achieve a resolution that is mutually satisfactory to all parties."

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam welcomed the SC ruling, saying this means Yunus can no longer hold the post.

Yunus' counsel Dr Kamal Hossain declined to make any comment.

Rokanuddin Mahmud, another counsel for Yunus, said he may continue as MD until Grameen board of directors appoints his

successor, as per the Bangladesh Bank's "removal letter".

The attorney general disagreed saying there was nothing like this in the letter.

Replying to a query, he said now that the top court has given its ruling on the issue, there is no scope for a compromise between Yunus and the government.

Earlier, Dr Kamal told the court that the BB removed Yunus without issuing a prior notice seeking his explanation, which is a violation of principles of natural justice.

He said Yunus was appointed the Grameen Bank MD with the BB approval in 1990. Besides, the central bank conducted audit at the Grameen at different times, but raised no question about Yunus' appointment and his holding office as MD.

There was no need for further approval regarding his appointment, he continued.

The HC had rejected the petitions without issuing any rule upon the government or BB to explain Yunus' sacking.

"We had placed before the High Court interpretation of law, relevant papers and information in support of the writ petitions, but the government placed no papers against the petitions," Kamal said.

Mahbubey Alam told the SC bench that the HC has rightly delivered the verdict after examining the relevant documents and hearing the arguments from both sides.

Dr Yunus cannot hold the office of MD, since his retirement age was over in 1999, he added.

Mahmudul Islam, Rokanuddin Mahmud, Sara Hossain and Mustafizur Rahman Khan assisted Dr Kamal Hossain, while Tawfique Nawaz appeared for Bangladesh Bank.

3 cops sued

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Metropolitan Magistrate Abdul Qader recorded statement of the complainant and fixed today for order on the issue.

The complainant alleged that the accused on March 27, 2010, entered the residences of Ziaun Nahar and her son Arifur Rashid at Khilgaon Taltola and demanded Tk 5 lakh as extortion, of which they paid Tk 50,000. On March 30 this year, the same policemen asked for the same amount of money from the complainants and received Tk 18,000.

She alleged her daughter Lipi and Delwar are involved in anti-social activities and had been harassing her with threats and even set corrupt police personnel after her. The complainant along with locals of the area had been trying to resist them.

Jamaat men clash

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from the spot and in front of Jamaat-e-Islami office.

The clash started around 5:20pm when police barred a Jamaat-Shibir procession at Paltan intersection. The procession was heading towards Muktangon to hold a rally demanding release of top Jamaat leaders arrested in connection with war crimes during the Liberation War in 1971.

Dispersed and chased, the activists took shelter in Baitul Mukarram mosque and started pelting police with brickbats.

According to party insiders, Jamaat leaders took the rally as a challenge as police earlier in the day barred supporters of Fazlul Huq Aminee, chief of Islamic Oikya Jote, from holding a rally at the same venue.

Around 6:30pm, police again confronted Jamaat-Shibir activists in front of the Jamaat office. They shot rubber bullets and hurled teargas canisters as the activists tried to gather and hold a rally there.

Vehicular movement in Baitul Mukarram and Paltan

areas came to a total halt during the clashes. Panicked pedestrians were seen running for safety.

A huge number of police was deployed in Muktangon, Baitul Mukarram and Paltan areas since yesterday afternoon.

AMINEE'S RALLY FOILED

Earlier in the afternoon, police foiled a rally at Muktangon called by Aminee in protest of the Women Development Policy.

Police charged truncheons to disperse Aminee's supporters when they tried to gather there.

Deputy Commissioner Krishna Pada Roy of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Ramna Zone) said they barred the followers as Aminee took no permission for the rally.

In an immediate press briefing Aminee claimed that police beat up his party leaders and activists when they went to hold the rally. He threatened to forge an anti-government movement if the government did not punish people responsible for the harassment of the leaders and activists of Islamic Law Implementation Committee.

Shokrana

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against only three accused."

The committee reviewed the case for the third time yesterday.

Home ministry sources said the 13th meeting of the committee in April last year recommended for relieving two accused -- Kazi Kamal Uddin Ahmed and Md Mahibur Rahman -- of the charges.

The 18th meeting decided to drop charges against another accused, Parimal Kumar.

Both the meetings opined that the case against Shokrana should continue, a top ministry official said on condition of anonymity.

Bogra PP Abdul Matin told The Daily Star yesterday that he received two letters from the home ministry that recommended dropping charges against all the four accused.

According to him, the first letter in April last year asked him to take steps for withdrawing charges against Kamal and Mahibur. In October the same year, he received a second letter that recommended dropping charges against the two others -- Shokrana and Parimal.

Matin, however, could neither produce the second letter, nor give its date.

Joint forces on February 12, 2007 seized more than 18,000 sacks of pulses worth over Tk 5 crore from Shokrana's store.

Following the seizure, a case was filed against Shokrana and Parimal with Bogra Sadar Police Station.

In March the same year, Bogra police pressed charges against four people. **CASES WITHDRAWN** The committee yesterday recommended for withdrawing 49 cases out of 411 reviewed.

With this, the committee has so far recommended 7, 031 cases, mostly against Awami League men, for withdrawal after reviewing 10,536 cases.

The committee will hold one more meeting, Quamrul Islam said.

Ivory Coast

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run-off vote, and the UN certified the result.

Forces loyal to Mr Ouattara, a former International Monetary Fund economist, began a dramatic military offensive last week, sweeping in from the north and west.

US President Barack Obama has condemned the violence, saying it could have been averted if Mr Gbagbo had respected the election result.

"To end this violence and prevent more bloodshed, former President Gbagbo must stand down immediately," Mr Obama said in a statement.

Our correspondent, Andrew Harding, says news of the surrender talks has been circulating rapidly.

It has not been greeted with excitement but with a weary sense of relief, he says, as people ask why Mr Gbagbo had to put them through all this war and destruction.

Many civilians remain trapped in their homes. Food, water and electricity are scarce in the city of about four million people after days of fighting.

Mr Gbagbo's army chief, Gen Philippe Mangou, told the AFP news agency his troops had stopped fighting.

"Following the bombardment by the French forces on some of our positions and certain strategic points in the city of Abidjan, we have ourselves stopped fighting and have asked the general commanding [Unoci] for a ceasefire," Gen Mangou said.

Gen Mangou deserted last week, but was said to have returned to the Gbagbo fold on Monday after an apparent change of heart.

On Monday, UN and French helicopters attacked several targets around Mr Gbagbo's compound. The UN said the raids were to stop attacks on civilians.

Patrick Achi, a spokesman for Mr Ouattara, told the BBC earlier that if Mr Gbagbo were captured, he would be arrested and "brought to justice".

In fighting extremism

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outer garments. Given their demeanor and body language they clearly intended to engage in scuffles with the police, and if chance should come, physically fight with them. Knowing full well what happens when there is a street fight with the police, bringing the holy book on to the streets is a clear indication that these people wanted the Holy Quran to be exposed to situations when it might be unwittingly and unintentionally desecrated. The aim appears to have been to show on TV screen and in newspaper photographs that our holy book was desecrated by police. This then could be used to fan anti-government sentiment.

Such blatant, shameless, and cynical use of religion and of our Quran had never been seen in the past, and must be condemned by all.

To us nothing exposes the moral bankruptcy of these agitators as the sight that they stooped to using our Holy Quran for their narrow political purpose.

Now let us come to the issue of the women's development policy that is supposed to be against Quranic injunction. In our view the whole argument is: a) based on misinterpretation; b) a deliberate falsification of what the policy contains; and c) a distortion of the purpose of the policy.

The policy only reiterates what is already in the country's constitution, that men and women must be given equal rights in all respects. This means in education, in health services, in job opportunities, in pay, in business opportunities, in politics, etc. In no activity of the state can there be any discrimination. There cannot be any question of Bangladesh having any discriminatory policy towards women or towards any individual or group.

The specific question where a Quranic injunction exists is on the question of inheritance of paternal property. But the women's development policy in question has remained totally silent about inheritance. There is absolutely no reference to property inheritance in the policy of the government.

So why is such a blatantly false issue being raised against the government? In our view, it is simply to use religion to drum up anti-government

agitation.

During our time with Pakistan, the oft used propaganda against Awami League was that it was a party against Islam. It is ironic that the slogans and propaganda tactics that we heard and saw in the late fifties, sixties, and in the freedom fighting days of the early seventies -- are now being repeated. Those who opposed Bangladesh's liberation war, propagated that a break up of Pakistan was against Islam and the Muslim Ummah. They also said that in independent Bangladesh Islam would vanish. At that time religion was used to stop us from getting our freedom and independence. Today the same slogans and propaganda are being made to stop us from moving forward.

There is a very relevant lesson for us to learn from Pakistan. Born in the name of religion, it was never able to shed misuse of religion from its day to day politics. In the 24 years that we were part of Pakistan, we saw how our language, culture, and economic rights were suppressed in the name of Islam. Every time we raised a social, cultural or economic issue -- the response was "Islam khetrey mey hai" (Islam is in danger). Having learnt nothing from our independence, and the consequent breakup of Pakistan, the same blatant misuse of Islam continued. Gen Ziaul Huq epitomises the misuse of religion for political and personal gain. He used it to strengthen his rule, but it fundamentally weakened his country, and sowed seeds of self destruction. The daily news of suicide bombers killing innocent civilians can only be understood by looking at the long term misuse of religion for political purpose.

We think the people of Bangladesh must be made aware that use of Islam by these extremist groups are never either for the glory of Islam or for the prosperity of the Muslims. It is for the gain of a small coterie of people who exploit peoples' religious sentiments for political support, as they have nothing else to offer to gain public support. Once and for all this must be stopped and people who indulge in it exposed.

We will clearly state that there are many issues where we think the government should be criticised, yesterday's meeting also discussed to restore the original Article-56 of the 1972 constitution to discourage appointing technocrat ministers, meeting sources said.

According to the original article, if anybody, who is not an MP, was appointed as a member of the council of ministers, he or she has to be elected a member of parliament in next six months to remain in the office.

The spirit of the article was that the country would be ruled by only elected people.

But later, amendments to the constitution empowered the prime minister to appoint one-tenth of the number of the members of the council of ministers from people qualified for election as MPs. And once appointed, he or she can continue office as long as the premier wants.

The meeting also discussed Article-70, which is blamed for imposing stringent restrictions on MPs in parliament preventing them from playing their due role independently, and Article-78, which deals with privileges and immunities of parliament and lawmakers.

Asked about the committee's discussion, Suranjit Sengupta, co-chair and spokesman of the special committee, said he would disclose the contents of the discussion today in a press briefing. The committee sits again today.

The eighth parliament increased the numbers to 45 for the next 10 years by passing the constitution's 14th amendment act in 2005."

Now 45 MPs are elected indirectly by lawmakers who are elected to 300 constituencies.

Besides, two MPs will represent a constituency, which may contradict with the constitutional provision for single territorial constituencies, the member said.

"Considering the difficulties, we may opt for increasing the number of reserved seats to 60 from 45 with indirect election," he said.

Now 45 MPs are elected indirectly by lawmakers who are elected to 300 constituencies.

and mass agitation would be fully justified. But the women's development policy is far from being one of them. In fact it is one where the government deserves a lot of credit.

We strongly feel that this government, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina must be given our unstinting support in fighting this retrogressive element. We must remember that extremism has done no good to any people anywhere in the world. The Muslims all over the world must get their due recognition and respect from other nations and countries. Demonising Islam and discrimination against the Muslims must stop. The Palestinian people must be given their rights. But extremism will get us none of that. Pakistan serves as a good example as to what happens if extremism is not tackled with a firm hand and in good time. We must also acknowledge, other than Sheikh Hasina's government none dared to take the bull by the horn, and fight extremism with courage, determination, and a lot of political and personal risk.

The terror created by extremist leader Bangla Bhai and outlawed JMB (Jama'atul Mujahideen, Bangladesh) are still very fresh in our memories, and all that happened during the rule of BNP-led four-party coalition government. The synchronised bomb blasts across the country, suicide bombings, and all grenade attacks had evident extremist links, but investigations were clueless then as BNP chose not to see the consequences of dating dangerous elements. The opposition must study what has happened in Pakistan, and stop flirting with extremism just because it gives an additional number of cadres to harass the government with.

The government, on its part, must initiate a mass contact programme to go, if necessary, door to door, and speak to each and every rural and urban household, and explain to them the false and motivated use that is being made of religion. Here the Grand Alliance must bring all its workers and local leaders together. It is a battle for the hearts and minds of the people, and cannot be won either by police action, or by forces or rhetorical exhortations.

This is a battle we cannot afford to lose.

HSC Exams

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conducting the two-month-long HSC, Alim and Business Management examinations for 2011 with the examinees taking Bangla First Paper examination yesterday. The students will sit for Bangla Second Paper exam on Thursday.

Nearly 7.80 lakh candidates of 7,288 educational institutions across the country have registered to take the exams this year.

Among the expelled students, 40 were from Bangladesh Technical Education Board while five each from Rajshahi and Madrasa boards; four each from Dhaka and Jessore boards, three from Dinajpur board; two from Chittagong board and one from Barisal board, according to the education ministry control room.

The highest number of absentees, 2,054, yesterday was from Dhaka Board.

This is for the first time the education ministry allocated 15 minutes extra time for the physically-challenged examinees.

Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid visited the centres at Dhaka College and Dhaka City College in the capital and spoke to the examinees, guardians and centre officials.

Talking to reporters, he expressed satisfaction over the peaceful atmosphere and said the tendency of adopting unfair means in the public examinations has declined significantly.

"Nowadays students do not come to the exam halls with the tendency to cheat," he said, seeking cooperation from all to ensure a tranquil atmosphere during the examination period.

Education Secretary Dr Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury and officials from the ministry and Dhaka board were present.

The written examinations will end on May 31.

JCD leader

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his five-year-old son Hamza Rashid from his school at Paltan.

Locals rushed him to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Bullet-hit Habib alleged some activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League attacked him over his business.

Hospital sources said he received bullets in his head and chest.

Hundreds of leaders and activists of BNP and JCD, led by BNP's Senior Joint Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, visited Habib at DMCH. They protested the attack and demanded arrest of the criminals.

Later, the victim was shifted to Labaid Specialised Hospital.

SC stays

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BGMEA President Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin earlier on the day filed the petition with the apex court, seeking stay on the operation of the verdict.

The chamber judge yesterday also asked BGMEA president to file a regular leave-to-appeal petition with SC against the HC verdict within six weeks.

In a judgement on April 3, the HC ordered the authorities concerned to demolish the BGMEA building on Begunbari-Hatirjheel canal, saying it was illegally built by earth-filling and on a land acquired through forgery.

It had also asked the tenants to vacate the building and move their belongings within 90 days from the date of receiving the copy of the verdict.

The BGMEA, owner of the building, did not take approval of the plan and construction from Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), said the judgement.

The HC delivered the judgement after hearing a suo moto rule issued by it on October 3 last year seeking explanation why the building should not be demolished.

Barrister Rokanuddin Mahmud appeared for BGMEA.