

No polls without caretaker

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districts to press home the demand for reinstatement of the caretaker system.

"The government must quit forthwith and let a general election be held under a non-party caretaker government. A neutral election commission will have to be formed through discussions to ensure free and fair polls," she said as thousands of opposition activists in front of the BNP headquarters at Naya Paltan roared their approval.

In July, parliament passed the 15th amendment to the constitution to abolish the caretaker government system and allow general election under elected government.

BNP alleged the constitutional changes are meant to make sure the Awami League-led alliance stay in power forever.

In her speech yesterday, Khaleda made a raft of pledges, which she said, will be implemented once her party is voted back to power. "We will ensure good governance and resist corruption; power generation will get the highest priority; the judiciary will be neutral and independent; and the constitution will be amended to implement people's will."

The leader of the opposition was scathing about the AL-led coalition. "Democracy is being crushed under police boots. The judiciary, police and civil administration have been politicised. A state cannot function this way. We must get rid of this situation by ousting this government through a mass uprising."

Slamming the government's foreign policy and the treaties signed with India, she said, "None of the deals can be implemented if people deem those unacceptable. We want friendly relations with India but not at the expense of national interests."

Activists of the alliance--BNP, Jamaat-e-Islami, Islami Oikya Jote (Amini faction) and Bangladesh Jatiya Party--started streaming into Naya Paltan and spilled over to adjacent areas long before the programme began around 3:00pm. They carried colourful banners, festoons, placards and portraits of BNP founder late president Ziaur Rahman, Khaleda and Senior Vice-President Tarique Rahman.

Greeted by chants of slogans, the BNP chief arrived at the venue at 3:40pm. From the podium, she waved to the cheering crowds.

Huge contingents of Rapid Action Battalion and police were deployed in and around the venue to maintain law and order.

Apart from the alliance components, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Liberal Democratic Party and Kalyan Party took part in the gathering.

Starting at 5:05pm, Khaleda spoke for over an hour. The former prime minister said political governments in the past could not hold fair elections and will not be able to do so in future as well.

She alleged the government is using Rab and police as party cadres and called upon the foreign agencies to stop providing the two forces with training facilities and UN mission jobs.

Accusing the AL-led grand alliance government of persecuting the opposition, she said, "They don't know they cannot cling to power by means of torture."

People have been suffering because of outrageous hike in prices of essentials and fuels, she continued.

While the finance minister is going from door to door for aids to support the ailing economy, the prime minister is abroad with a huge delegation promoting world peace, Khaleda observed.

The government has established a haven for looters where the ruling party high-ups are scooping money out of the capital market, she continued.

The BNP chief demanded the release of all detained opposition leaders including those of Jamaat.

Terming the war crimes tribunal partisan, she said nobody will accept any trial under it. "The government is not allowing Jamaat to hold rallies. Is it a banned organisation? Start from your own party men if you really want to try the war criminals."

She said, "A provision for referendum and 'faith in Almighty Allah' must be restored in the constitution."

The rally was chaired by BNP leader and Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka.

AGITATION PLANS

The opposition leader said they will stage a road march towards Sylhet from Dhaka on October 10 and hold a public meeting there the next day.

The rally was held at 3:40pm. From the podium, she waved to the cheering crowds.

A march towards Rajshahi and a rally in Bogra will be arranged on October 18 and another rally in Rajshahi the following day.

The party will conduct a road march towards Chittagong and stage a rally in Feni on October 25. A rally in Chittagong will be held the next day.

2G SCAM

CBI refuses to probe Chidambaram's role

IANS, New Delhi

The CBI yesterday objected to the central government telling the Supreme Court that it will examine documents given by Janata Party chief Subramanian Swamy indicating that Home Minister P Chidambaram, as the then finance minister, was also involved in fixing the 2G spectrum price.

Swamy is seeking a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe against Chidambaram alleging that the spectrum price was not decided by jailed former communications minister A. Raja alone but was jointly fixed by the two.

Militant attack in Philippines kills six

AFP, Manila

Muslim militants attacked a remote village on a strife-torn island in the southern Philippines yesterday and killed six people, the army said.

One soldier, a pro-government militiaman and four residents of the isolated village on Basilan island died in the raid that was carried out by the Abu Sayyaf group, said local military chief Colonel Alex Macario.

Five residents of the mainly Muslim populated town were also wounded, he said.

Macario said he did not yet know why the militants attacked. A police report said it was the result of a "long-standing family feud", but did not elaborate.

Basilan is regarded as one of the main strongholds for the Abu Sayyaf, a small gang of Islamic militants founded in the 1990s with the help of Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network.

Aug 21 attack

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Tribunal-1 passed the order after lawyers of 11 accused, including Jamaat-e-Islami Secretary General Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed and former state minister for home Lutfuzzaman Babar, submitted separate petitions seeking adjournment of the hearing.

In the petitions, the lawyers pleaded for time saying they had not yet received the necessary documents of the cases.

Thirty-two accused including Mojaheed and Babar, who are now behind bars, were produced before the tribunal.

Dhaka City Corporation ward councillor Ariful Islam Arif, now on bail, was present in the court.

Meantime, Harkatul Jihad chief Mufti Abdul Hannan yesterday submitted a petition for withdrawal of his confessional statement given on April 7 this year saying that he was tortured to give it.

But Judge Shahed Nuruddin of the tribunal, however, did not pass any order on the petition.

The same court on September 21 adjourned until yesterday the hearing after lawyers of 11 other accused including former inspectors general of police sought adjournment of the hearing.

Criminal Investigation Department submitted the supplementary charge sheets on July 3 mentioning 30 names in addition to the 22 accused in the main charge sheets.

Twenty-four people were killed and around 200 others injured in the grisly grenade attack on an Awami League rally at Bangabandhu Avenue on August 21 in 2004.

The then opposition leader Sheikh Hasina narrowly escaped the attack.

Police filed two cases -- one under the Explosive Substances Act, 1908 and the other for killing people -- in this connection.

11 robbers held

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Hathazari Police Station, police sources said.

Acting on a tip-off that a gang of criminals were preparing to commit a robbery at Pashchim Dholoi village of the upazila, a team of police led by the ASP and Hathazari Police Station Officer-in-charge Saimul Alam raided the village at 2:45am, said Babul.

The gunfight began when the robbers opened fire sensing the presence of the law enforcers, prompting police to retaliate, the ASP said.

During the one-hour gunfight, nearly 50 rounds of bullets were exchanged.

The law enforcers managed to catch the 11 robbers while the gang was trying to retreat from the scene sensing defeat.

Police also recovered 24 rounds of bullets, 10 machetes and six mobile phone sets from their possession.

The three injured robbers are Kawsar, 25, the gang leader, of Jangal Latifpur under Sitakunda; Jamal, 28, of Rangunia; and Shahin, 32, of Bhola were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Other arrestees are identified as Najmul Khan, 22, of Hathazari; Mohiuddin, 25, Mohammad Mia, 28, and Alam, 20 of Sitakunda; Belal, 22 and Monir Uddin, 21, of Sandwip; Nirob, 22 of Noakhali; and Nazrul, 32 of Rangunia.

OC Saimul Alam said all the arrestees are members of an inter-district robber gang, and they were involved in robberies at different areas of the division including Chittagong, Sandwip, Comilla and Noakhali. They are also accused in several robbery cases filed with different police stations including Mirsarai, Sitakunda, Sandwip, and Rangunia, said the OC.

Police were interrogating the arrestees while filing of a case in this connection was underway, he added.

Victim of cheap politics

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Special Medical Attendance Rules, except that he and the members of his family shall be entitled to medical treatment at the residence of the judge; and such medical facilities shall continue to be admissible after the judge has retired or otherwise ceased to hold office," says the ordinance.

The government can provide an SC judge with any amount for his or her treatment at home or abroad, according to Rule 12 of Special Medical Attendance Rules 1950.

It says, "Nothing in these rules shall be construed as preventing the government from granting to any person to whom they apply any concession relating to medical treatment or attendance which is not authorized by the rules."

A law ministry document shows that 29 SC judges including five former chief justices were given nearly Tk 2.66 crore for treatment during their tenures from 1999 up to now.

He said all judges including Khairul Haque were given money from the prime minister's fund for welfare purpose.

SC officials said most judges do not know from which fund the government had given them money for treatment.

Different sections and political parties including the main opposition recently criticised giving money to some judges from the prime minister's welfare and relief fund for treatment.

Pro-BNP lawyers came down hard on former chief justice Khairul for taking money from the prime minister's fund.

Former chief justice Mohammad Fazlul Karim told The Daily Star that he was given Tk 2 lakh for his treatment in 2002 although he submitted a medical bill of Tk 4.5 lakh for treatment in an Indian hospital.

"I do not know from which fund the government had given me the money. A few newspapers wrongly reported that I was given more than Tk 3 lakh," he said.

Of the 29 judges, 25 were given money from the law ministry's fund after they received treatment. The rest were paid from the prime minister's fund before they got treatment, said an SC official requesting anonymity.

A law ministry high-up said the judges were given the money after the prime minister had approved their medical bills sent to the prime minister's office with the law ministry's recommendations.

The bills were submitted to the ministry with necessary documents through the SC registrar's office with the chief justice's consent, he said.

The official said the prime minister can provide money to anyone from the relief and welfare fund for treatment or any other welfare purposes.

Asking not to be named, a judicial official said lower court judges get a maximum of Tk 10,000 each for treatment from the government's benevolent fund. They can also get large amounts from the prime minister's fund for treatment.

Preferring anonymity, a former chief justice said the government should make clear from which fund it disburses money for treatment of judges and

their family members.

He said the government could easily make arrangements with Jiban Bima Corporation, a state-run insurance company, for treatment of judges and their family members.

Law Minister Shafique Ahmed refused to comment on providing money to four judges from the prime minister's fund.

"I am not aware of the distinction between the government funds from which the judges were given money for treatment," he said.

SC officials said justice Khairul did not personally ask for money from the prime minister's fund for his wife's treatment. Rather, it was the law ministry that managed the financial assistance after the SC sent a letter to the ministry.

The law ministry document shows former chief justice Latifur Rahman received Tk 3.45 lakh, MM Ruhul Amin got Tk 21.15 lakh, Md Tafazzul Islam received Tk 15.70 lakh and Mohammad Fazlul Karim took Tk 3.69 lakh from the law ministry's fund.

Appellate Division judges SK Sinha and Md Shamsul Huda, its former judges Abdul Aziz and Shah Abu Nayeem Mominur Rahman, and some High Court judges also received money from the same fund.

Four judges -- Khairul Haque, Kazi Ebadul Hoque, NK Chakraborty and SK Sinha -- were given money from the PM's relief and welfare fund.

Justices Khairul and Sinha received money from both the law ministry and the prime minister's funds for treatment, according to the document.

S Korea party chief to visit North

AFP, Seoul

South Korea's ruling party chief said yesterday he would visit North Korea this week to try to ease 18 months of high cross-border tensions.

Hong Joon-Pyo, leader of the conservative Grand National Party (GNP), said he proposed his trip to a jointly-run factory estate at Kaesong this Friday "because inter-Korean relations should not remain strained further."

The South's unification ministry, which must authorise all cross-border contacts, said it had held talks with the North to arrange the one-day trip.

Hong told reporters he had no plans to meet the North's officials.

But the one-day visit will be the highest-level political exchange since relations went into deep freeze last year, after two deadly attacks which Seoul blamed on its neighbour.

Car blast kills 5 near Afghan police HQ

AFP, Lashkar Gah

A suicide car bombing killed five people and wounded two dozen others near a police headquarters in southern Afghanistan yesterday, officials said.

Mohammad Rasoul, a spokesman for the Afghan army, said three police were killed and three others wounded in the blast in Lashkar Gah, capital of troubled Helmand province.

Enayatullah Ghafari, public health director in the province, told AFP that two dead civilians were also brought to local hospitals.

Some 25 other people, both police and civilians, were also wounded, he said.

No one claimed responsibility of the attack yet.

There have been a string of attacks in Lashkar Gah since British troops formally handed control of security in the area to the Afghan army on July 20, including a suicide car bomb attack on police headquarters which killed 13 people.

Rally causes

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Police halted the movement of vehicles on these streets in the afternoon. Processions by opposition activists from different parts of the city made the situation even worse.

Schoolchildren, patients and their attendants and service holders ran into troubles due to tailbacks.

"I took a bus from Motijheel around 10:00am for Birdem Hospital, but police stopped it near Paltan. Failing to take any vehicle, my granddaughter and I started walking under the scorching sun," Nobir Hossain told The Daily Star.

A large number of buses and minibuses carried people to the meeting venue. This significantly cut down the number of public transports on city streets resulting in sufferings for the commuters, pointed out drivers and transport workers.

BNP sought permission to hold the rally at city's Paltan Maidan, but the government did not allow it.

Monirul Islam, who came from Barisal to attend the rally, said people would have suffered less, if the government had allowed BNP to use the Paltan Maidan.

Interestingly, there was no traffic jam at Motijheel, Paltan, Jatiya Press Club, Shahabagh, Nilkhet, Moghbazar, Saatrastra, Banglamotor and Farmgate intersections around 6:15pm.

"Commuters and private cars avoided the areas adjacent to the rally venue from noon. That's why movement of vehicles on roads became thin by evening," mentioned bus driver Abdus Sattar.

Wasa warned

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severe noise pollution with a powerful electric generator in the capital's Lalmatia.

DoE also summoned executive engineer and project director of the Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) and ordered remedial measures to stop the nuisance within a month.

They were also instructed not to operate the generator during the night.

The one-megawatt generator, set up at Wasa's Lalmatia office, has been creating noise pollution since mid-September making locals' life miserable, said Mohammad Munir Chowdhury, director of DoE.

Around 11 children and elderly people have so far been admitted to hospital having complaints in heart, brain and ear caused by the noise, he said.

More than a hundred affected locals in a written complaint said that children, ailing and elderly people have been the worst affected due to unbearable noise of the generator, he said.

Though the permissible noise level in the locality is 55 decibel, DoE officials found the generator created noise at 80 decibel.

In the event of failure to stop the nuisance, the generator would be seized and fine realised, said Chowdhury.

Mosthafizur Rahman, executive engineer, and Baharul Islam, project director of Wasa, admitted to the complaint and said in a written undertaking to the DoE director that they would immediately take remedial measures to control noise pollution.

Same old Osman

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criminals during the last AL regime.

His two rivals in the upcoming poll Selina Hayat Ivy, a vice president of the town unit AL, and BNP District Unit President Taimur Alam Khandoker have a number of allegations against him, but it seems that they are also afraid to speak against him.

Some top ranking BNP leaders of the city spoke against "his" illegal activities without mentioning his name. When asked who they mean by "he", they said everybody knows who that person is.

Being frightened, both electoral rivals of Shamim demanded deployment of the army and a reshuffle in the civil administration and police prior to the Narayanganj City Corporation poll due on October 30.

"We thought he would change himself after returning home from hiding. But we have been proven wrong," a local resident told The Daily Star on Monday preferring not to be named.

Criminals are still surrounding the controversial leader, he added.

Giving the example of a recent incident where Shamim threatened to harm ruling party lawmaker of the district Sarah Begum Kabori -- Taimur said when a lawmaker is threatened at a law and order meeting in front of the deputy commissioner and high police and civil officials, how could people be safe from that person.

"I don't want to mention his name. Everybody knows him," the BNP leader said in

his Narayanganj residence.

Ivy, the immediate past mayor of the now defunct Narayanganj municipality, said Shamim Osman is manoeuvring to make it difficult for her to contest in the mayoral poll.

"He is using the administration to do whatever he feels necessary against me," she alleged. As an example she talked about an incident when her media briefing at Narayanganj Press Club was suddenly foiled by police.

She said she believes Shamim was behind the incident and many others like that.

Asked about the allegations, Shamim Osman yesterday said, "If there is any allegation against me, I will definitely correct myself. But I don't have any allegation against anybody." He termed the allegations against him "antiquated".

"How many times we will speak about the past? Let's move forward and work together for the betterment of the people of Narayanganj and create an example for all," he said adding that the overall atmosphere in the city is fine.

Shamim Osman returned to Narayanganj in April 2009 after around eight years' of self-exile. He fled to India and then to Canada after AL's poll debacle in 2001 national election. He returned home once before in 2006 but after a brief stay left the country again before the 1/11 political change-over in 2007.

Shamim was accused in a number of criminal cases, but the proceedings of all the cases against him were stayed by the High Court.