

BNP rejects

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of the party's highest policy-making body last night.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia chaired the meeting at her Gulshan office in the capital. She asked her party men to continue their street programmes, meeting sources said.

President Zillur Rahman yesterday opened the dialogue with the parties amid uncertainty looming over its success. On the first day, he held talks with the leaders of Jatiya Party and Jatiya Samantantrik Dal, two components of the Awami League-led ruling alliance that was instrumental in Zillur Rahman's election as president in 2009.

The main opposition party is yet to decide on joining the talks.

The party will make the decision after getting a formal invitation, said the standing committee member on condition of anonymity.

He added that if invited, the party would rather like to know from the president whether the next general election would be held under a political government or a caretaker government.

The government in June scrapped the caretaker government system, thus allowing the incumbent administration to oversee the next general election due in early 2014. While the opposition threatens to boycott the polls under the current administration, the ruling AL maintains that the elections will be held under its supervision.

Earlier in the day yesterday, BNP questioned the motive behind the president's dialogue on the constitution of the EC.

"The president is highly respected person. But he does not determine politics. And that is why it's not comprehensible why he is holding the dialogue," the party's acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said at a press briefing at the party's central office at Naya Paltan.

"The president is not supposed to take such initiatives," he said, adding that the move should have been made by the people who can implement political parties' recommendations on forming the Election Commission.

Asked about the BNP's course of action if it was invited to the dialogue, Fakhrul avoided a direct reply. He said: "We didn't say that we won't take part. We didn't get any invitation. The decision will be made at the party standing committee meeting."

He also recalled that Chief Election Commissioner ATM Shamsul Huda himself had said the dialogue might not bear any fruit.

The tenure of the current EC expires early in February next year.

Talking to journalists, Fakhrul also declared a two-day fresh demonstration protesting "secret killings and the government's repression and police action on BNP men".

He alleged that "Awami League criminals in police uniform" had obstructed his party's programmes in the capital on Wednesday.

As part of the protest, the party will demonstrate at thana level on December 24 and at district level on December 26 across the country.

Opposition

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issue through discussions. We are confident we would be able to convince India about our grievances," he told a gathering here in the evening.

District and city AL organised the rally in City Point area, blocking traffic on the busy road for hours, to mark the 40th anniversary of independence among other issues.

Expressing his gratitude for the all-out assistance by India during the Liberation War, Suranjit said, "The opposition wants to ignore India's sincere contribution to our independence."

The opposition would not be let to fish in the troubled water, he warned.

The rally was also attended among others by Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Social Welfare Minister Enamul Haque, Mostafa Shahid and City Mayor Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran.

Muhith said there would be no dam on Barak without a joint survey. The opposition is out to create an unstable situation in the country in the name of agitation against the proposed project.

The social welfare minister said the opposition is doing foul and baseless propaganda against the government as well as against the nation.

Tragedy unwrapped

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Maulana's son Ali and a mason named Enayet, who had by then joined the local peace committee and Razakar bahini to assist the occupation forces already encamped in the area since April 24.

Bholanath's wife Uma Bose could not shed a drop of tear. His mother and all the eleven children witnessed the brutal killing in their courtyard. The brutality was followed by another --- their forced conversion to Islam.

Forty years after the tragedy the Bose family unwrapped the tale yesterday by releasing a book under a title that said it all. "The Days of Suppressed Tears" is a collective memoir of the family of a martyr.

"Forty years are not time enough to heal the wounds you carry in your heart," said Jharna Bose, one of the six daughters of Bholanath and currently a citizen of India.

"Bangladesh is no more my country as I had to leave it. But what we have tried to say in the book is the story of all the families who lost their near and dear ones in the war for freedom. It is not only my pain any more but the pain of all," she said after the launch

of the book at the Liberation War Museum in the afternoon.

Comprising 20 essays, including 13 written by members of the Bose family, the book is a testimony to the role of collaborators, known as Razakars, and serves as evidence of the atrocities committed by the Pakistani occupation forces. The essays, some of which have been written by neighbors of Bholanath and his relatives, have thrown up a list of collaborators from Bagherhat and their role during the war of 1971.

Speakers at the launch demanded punishment of the identified war criminals and regretted that these days people looked for heroes from alien shores even though real heroes have much been in abundance in our own soil. They also urged citizens, especially the families and relatives of the martyrs, to follow the instance of the Bose family in order to help identify the war criminals and uproot them from society.

"In terms of its content the book resembles the unique work by Anne Frank, who revealed the long days of horror a family lived through

during the Second World War," said Pankaj Bhattacharya.

Liberation War Museum trustee Mofidul Haque and Jharna Bose have jointly edited the book. Journalist Shaheen Reza Nur, writer Anwara Syed Haque, and Daily Prothom Alo editor Matiur Rahman were among those who attended the book launch ceremony presided over by writer and environmentalist Dwijen Sharma.

All six daughters of Bholanath were compelled to settle in India in the interest of sheer survival. However, his sons stayed behind in a land where their father died a valiant death.

Even as he confronted death, the brave Bholanath did not try to escape but attempted to make a statement. "Brother, I have something to say," Uma Bose, in her essay, recalled Bholanath as saying moments before he was felled.

Though the heroic man was not given the chance to finish his statement, his sacrifice was to stand vindicated when his country eventually won freedom, the 40th anniversary of which is being observed this year.

It was a mistake

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The Defence Department said in a statement yesterday that the investigation found US forces -- given what information they had available to them at the time -- reacted in self-defence and with appropriate force after being fired upon from the direction of the Pakistani border in the November 26 incident.

"Inadequate coordination by US and Pakistani military officers operating through the border coordination centre -- including our reliance on incorrect mapping information shared with the Pakistani liaison officer -- resulted in a misunderstanding about the true location of Pakistani military units," said the statement, which was released in Washington.

"This, coupled with other gaps in information about the activities and placement of units from both sides, contributed to the tragic result," it said.

Nato, Afghanistan and Pakistan forces use the joint border control centres to share information and coordinate security operations. Pakistani officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the report. Afghan officials also had no immediate comment.

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Gen. James Mattis, head of US Central Command, appointed Brig Gen Stephen Clark, an Air Force special operations officer, to lead the investigation and the results were expected to have been delivered to him on Dec 23.

The Pakistani military has said it provided Nato with maps that clearly showed where the border posts were located.

It also claimed Nato provided Pakistani liaison officers with the wrong coordinates when the coalition asked if there were any Pakistani troops in the area where the strike took place.

In Mons, Belgium, Nato's supreme military headquarters, a spokesman said the joint force was fired on by what they thought were insurgents "and legitimately

responded in self-defence."

Col Gregory Julian said the investigation found that their response was legitimate within the laws of war and the troops own rules of engagement.

He acknowledged that "a series of mistakes were made on both sides in failing to properly coordinate their locations and actions," both before the operation and during the resulting engagement. He stressed that the joint unit "did not knowingly fire at the Pakistani forces."

"The investigation has substantiated that close air support was employed in self-defence in response to intense, heavy machine gun and mortar fire initiated by what turned out to be Pakistan forces near the border in the vicinity of Salala," an area in Pakistan's Mohmand tribal region.

"The November 26 attack, a furious Pakistani government has shut down Nato supply routes to Afghanistan and thrown the US out of Shamsi Airbase in southwestern Baluchistan province.

The base was used to maintain drones used in strikes against insurgents hiding in safe havens in Pakistan's lawless tribal belt on the Afghan frontier.

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In Mons, Belgium, Nato's supreme military headquarters, a spokesman said the joint force was fired on by what they thought were insurgents "and legitimately

return fire. They then called in air strikes from F-15 fighter bombers, Apache attack helicopters and an AC-130 Spectre gunship.

"There was also an element of mistrust that contributed to the mistakes," the official said, citing the report.

Pakistani forces that contributed to those losses -- we express our deepest regret. We further express sincere condolences to the Pakistani people, to the Pakistani government, and most importantly to the families of the Pakistani soldiers who were killed or wounded," the US statement said.

He added that the military's focus would now be to learn from the mistakes and "take whatever corrective measures are required to ensure an incident like this is not repeated."

"More critically, we must work to improve the level of trust between our two countries. We cannot operate effectively on the border -- or in other parts of our relationship -- without addressing the fundamental trust still lacking between us. We earnestly hope the Pakistani military will join us in bridging that gap," the statement said.

The Nato official said the incident occurred after a company-sized joint US-Afghan commando unit operating in the Afghan side of the border in eastern Kunar province.

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For most of the 10-year war in Afghanistan, 90 percent of supplies shipped to the international force came through Pakistan, via the port of Karachi. But over the past three years, road and rail shipments from Nato's European members via Russia and the Central Asian nations have expanded, and before the border incident accounted for more than half of all overland deliveries.

"For the loss of life -- and for the lack of proper coordination between US and

Cold-related

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wave and foggy weather could damage the seedling beds that ultimately may hamper Boro cultivation.

In Thakurgaon, 10 persons including seven children died in the last three days.

Dr Md Khairel Kabir, the acting civil surgeon, acknowledged to The Daily Star that seven children aged between three days and two years died mainly due to cold related causes on Tuesday and Wednesday night.

Hazera Begum, 53, Abdul Mazid, 65, and Shakhina Bawa, 65, of the Sadar upazila died during this period.

Earlier in the week, at least 10 people including six children died in the district due to similar complications.

According to District Agriculture Extension (DAE) office, yesterday's temperature in the district was recorded lowest at 10 degree and highest at 19 degree Celsius, a possible threat for the Boro farmers.

DAE Deputy Director Md Belayet Hossain said if the same weather persists for further several days it may hamper Boro seedlings.

The DAE officials and staff are suggesting the farmers to use polythene over the seedbeds to save them from cold and fog, he said.

In Jamalpur, at least 14 persons including three children in four upazilas of the district died during the last four days.

According to local administration and respective union parishad chairmen, the victims had been suffering from acute cold related ailments.

Deputy Commissioner Md Siraj Uddin Ahmed said 4,983 blankets were already distributed among the poor.

In Jessor, Abdul Mannan, a sub-inspector of Monirampur Police Station, died of cold-related diseases yesterday morning.

Md Sairuddin, officer-in-charge of the station, told our Benapole correspondent that Mannan, hailing from Chaudanga, felt uneasy in the morning when he went to the police station for duty.

He was suffering from serious cold-related complications. Doctors declared him dead soon after he was admitted to the Jessor Medical College Hospital.

Meanwhile, an elderly person died of cold-related diseases in Rangpur's Pircacha upazila.

Motiar Rahman Kandura, 75, died about 1:00pm at Pircacha Upazila Health Complex, Dr Fahimul Islam Mondol said adding that 21 people including three children suffering from pneumonia, diarrhoea and asthma were admitted to the hospital yesterday.

Rangpur Met Office said the lowest temperature yesterday was recorded at 10.2 degree Celsius.

The sweeping cold claimed the life of a two-year-old baby in Debhata upazila of Satkhira on Wednesday night. Local physicians said Nasima Khatun, of village Noapara, died of respiratory and cold-related complications.

The bone-chilling cold wave coupled with drizzle for the last three days disrupted normal life in Narail. The minimum temperature in the district was recorded at 6.6 degrees Celsius yesterday.

Increasing number of patients, especially children and elderly people, are crowding hospitals with cold-related ailments, said Dr Moshiur Rahman Babu, Medicine consultant of Narail Sadar Hospital.

Dense fog has paralysed normal life in all the nine upazilas of Kurigram.

About three lakh people of some 250 char (shoal) areas in the district are the worst sufferers in the bitter cold, reported our Kurigram correspondent.

SAHR worried

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recover the disappeared persons, SAHR said it would be a complete anachronism in democracy if the perpetrators are law enforcers or hired killers or any other impersonating gangs.

It also urged the government to accede to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances.

If the law enforcers take law into their own hands or fail to rein in gangs doing it, the state's authority is also laid open to question, SAHR said.

RHD engineers

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voiced their demands.

Some engineers have been in a state of panic as a three-member ACC team, formed in September to sniff out corruption, recently started scrutinising documents related to various ongoing road development projects and their expenditures. They have been meeting officials engaged in the projects and demanding to see documents.

Apart from investigating the cases against the corrupt RHD officials, the anti-graft body has also been carrying out an institutional enquiry into the RHD to dig deeper into the corruption within the department.

The meeting discussed different issues including organisational matters, implementation of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Peace Treaty and BNP-Jamaat's anti-government propaganda.

Party sources said the premier organised the meeting to get first-hand information about these issues, among many others. She will also meet the leaders of other districts in phases.

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"The ministry should punish us if there is any fault in our activities. We need a bantabrikha [a banyan tree that protects], " Superintendent Engineer of RHD Iftekhar Kabir, also vice-president of RHD Engineers' Association, told Communications Secretary Monzor Hossain at the meeting.

Supporting him, the association's president and RHD Additional Secretary Aminur Rahman Laskar said the engineers did not want to be in fear or in panic. "Rather, we want to work under a banyan tree," he said, hinting at such a role being played by the secretary.

The secretary said he would try to do his part but the communications minister would have to play the bigger role.

However, Obaidul Quader in his brief remarks told the meeting that his ministry was to bring back discipline and chain of command in the RHD.

The communications secretary said he had already taken steps in this regard.

There have been widespread allegations against RHD engineers in connection with misappropriation of road development and maintenance funds. Corruption is thought to be the main reason behind the poor condition of the country's roads and highways.

During the period of the last caretaker government, at least 40 RHD officials, including the last chief engineer

country in good condition, not to construct new roads," he said.