

Both parties going tough

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would increase turbulence in the country's politics, Akbar Ali Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the AL and BNP stances might put the country into deep political turmoil.

The opposition's anti-government movement to press home its demand for the restoration of a non-party caretaker government to hold the next general elections acquired a momentum with the sudden disappearance of M Ilias Ali, one of the central leaders of the party, on April 17.

Ever since, the BNP has been accusing the government of being behind what it has called the forced disappearance while the government has been refuting it and terming the incident a planned drama by the main opposition.

The BNP has already enforced a countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal over a period of five days to mount pressure on the government to find Ilias. During the period, the nation witnessed the death of five people, with scores of people being injured together with a series of violence, vandalism and setting vehicles afire.

Frustrated with the agitation, the government has decided to handle the opposition with an iron hand. It is now obvious that the government and ruling party policymakers are in little mood to spare anyone in the BNP if they try to disrupt public life.

"The main opposition has been hurling threats at the government only to gain political benefits. BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia does not want Ilias Ali to be found,"

AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam alleged yesterday while speaking at a party rally at Bangabandhu Avenue in the capital.

If they [BNP] wanted Ilias, they definitely would have cooperated with the government, which they did not, he said while referring to the AL's appeal to the BNP to help the government in tracing Ilias.

Sources in the ruling party believe that had the government gone soft on the opposition, the BNP would have tried to derive advantage from it. They are of the opinion that the government has been trying its best to trace Ilias but the five days' hartal and violence have discouraged the government high-ups from working on the issue sincerely.

"How can we tolerate their [opposition] resorting to violence and vandalism when it is the government's responsibility to ensure people's safety and security?" Mahbubul Alam Hanif, AL joint general secretary, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the government had shown tolerance when the opposition observed peaceful programmes. "It [govt] cannot sit idle when they [opposition] vandalise vehicles and damage public property, business and houses. It just can't happen," he added.

For their part, opposition policymakers think they have no way of retreating from their position after Ilias has gone missing and raids have been made and "false" charges brought against their senior leaders.

They say the only option they had was to go for tougher agitation, which of course including a series of hartals and blockades.

If the opposition had soft-

ened its stance over finding Ilias, the government would have more opposition leaders disappear to foil the anti-government movement and to weaken the party ahead of the next elections, according to senior BNP leaders.

Moudud Ahmed, a BNP standing committee member, said the opposition would go for an even stronger movement and there was no alternative to ousting the government to have its demands realised.

"There is no point of return now as all the issues have been created by the government and they must solve those," Lt Gen (ret'd) Mahbubur Rahman, another BNP standing committee member, told The Daily Star.

He alleged that the BNP had been forced to launch the movement as the government had caused the disappearance of Ilias Ali, filed false charges against senior BNP leaders and had not restored the caretaker government system.

Asked about the charges brought against the BNP leaders, Hanif, also a special assistant to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, said, "It was he [BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir] who threatened to set the country ablaze if their leader was not traced. So it was obvious that the law enforcers would bring charges against him over the blasts and vandalism."

Border haat

FROM PAGE 20
state of Meghalaya in India, the haat occupies an area of 70-square metres and is expected to serve the villagers living inside five-kilometre radius on both sides of the border.

Railwaygate probe body

FROM PAGE 1
submit written statement explaining the haul of Tk 70 lakh around midnight on April 9 and the subsequent detention of the three.

Meanwhile, Director General of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) Maj Gen Anwar Hossain yesterday assured the committee members of his full cooperation, when the members met him at his office at Pilkhana BGB headquarters.

"I had a primary discussion with the committee members. I will do everything necessary to help with the investigation," the DG told The Daily Star last night.

If required, the committee can interrogate any officer and jawan, he mentioned. "I have instructed everyone to cooperate with the committee members."

It was the first visit by the committee to the headquarters of the border guards since it was formed.

Ali Azam Khan, driver of Omar Faruq Talukder, sacked assistant personal secretary (APS) to former railway minister Suranjit Sengupta, pulled over Faruk's microbus to Pilkhana, blowing whistle on carrying illegal money in the vehicle.

Railway's general manager (east) Yusuf Ali Mridha and Dhaka division security commandant Enamul Huq were the other passengers of the microbus.

The BGB men later freed the four in the following morning.

Head of the probe com-

mittee Abu Taher, director general of Bangladesh Railway, and his aide Shashi Kumar Singha, joint secretary of railway ministry, went to Pilkhana around 11:00am. They first visited the spot where the driver had pulled over.

The railway DG said they are yet to determine how many officers and jawans were present that night. "We may first take written statements from each of them and then interrogate only some of them, if required," he added.

DRIVER FAILS TO APPEAR
Azam, who remains traceless since the incident, failed to appear before the probe body yesterday in line with its order.

The committee sent a letter to Azam on April 22, asking him to come to the Rail Bhaban by 11:00am yesterday along with his written statement explaining his role in the cash haul.

This was the second letter sent to his permanent address in Chandpur as he did not appear before the committee on April 22.

ANOTHER COMMITTEE FORMED
The railway ministry yesterday formed another committee to detect irregularities in the recruitment of Bangladesh Railway.

The main role of the three-member committee will be to oversee the already formed four-member committee now probing the alleged corruption and irregularities, ministry sources said.

Additional Director

General (operation) of railway Mohammad Shahjahan will lead the new committee. Two deputy secretaries of the ministry will assist him.

The four-member committee headed by railway's Joint Director General (mechanical) visited Chittagong last week. They are examining the related records, recruitment examination sheets and formation of the examination committees.

"The committee will visit Chittagong again next week. Everything regarding the recruitment will be verified thoroughly," a senior railway official told The Daily Star yesterday.

Some 1,128 persons were appointed in the railway's east zone in the last one year as part of recruiting a total of 7,275 persons across the country.

Yusuf in collaboration with Faruk allegedly realised huge cash from the appointees and other jobseekers. They took Tk 3 lakh to Tk 5 lakh from each of the job seekers. The Tk 70 lakh being carried in the APS's microbus was believed to have been collected from the job seekers.

The railwaygate scandal led to the resignation of railway minister Suranjit Sengupta. The government, though, later retained him in the cabinet as a minister without portfolio.

The APS has been sacked and the two railway officials have been suspended.

MUHITH'S REFUSAL Destiny seeks to clarify

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Destiny Group yesterday said Finance Minister AMA Muhith refused to meet its delegation on Sunday as he was very busy with an official matter.

The four-member delegation included Chairman Rafiqul Amin and President Lt Gen (ret'd) M Harun-Ar-Rashid.

A statement, which came following reports on Muhith's refusal to meet the team, said they wanted to inform the minister of "socio-economic importance of Destiny" and direct selling or multilevel marketing.

"We think, it is urgent to meet the finance minister for the interest of mass people," said the statement signed by Rafiqul Amin.

Destiny recently came under the scanner of regulators for alleged irregularities in the name of MLM.

The National Board of Revenue froze bank accounts of five Destiny Group directors including Rafiqul Amin. It also asked banks for information about M Harun-Ar-Rashid's accounts.

Bangladesh Bank instructed all banks to provide it with information about the accounts of the company's 14 directors and 37 sister organisations.

On Sunday, an appointment was arranged with Muhith after a leader of pro-ruling party student organisation Bangladesh Chhatra League told him that some leaders of Sector Commanders Forum wanted to meet him.

M Harun-Ar-Rashid, who is also a leader of the forum, went to the finance ministry along with Rafiqul Amin and the other two.

Muhith denied them the chance to meet him knowing beforehand that the issues of Destiny may be raised, a ministry official said.

The Destiny Group statement also said its concerns Destiny 2000 Ltd, Destiny Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd and Destiny Tree Plantation are running business legally.

Titanic-II

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to New York set for 2016.

Palmer, a self-made mining billionaire, said he had commissioned state-owned Chinese company CSC Jinling Shipyard to construct Titanic II with the same dimensions as its predecessor.

"It will be every bit as luxurious as the original Titanic but of course it will have state-of-the-art 21st century technology and the latest navigation and safety systems," Palmer said in a statement.

"Titanic II will sail in the northern hemisphere and her maiden voyage from England to North America is scheduled for late 2016."

He added that he had invited the Chinese navy to escort the Titanic II to New York.

The announcement comes just weeks after the 100th anniversary of the sinking of Titanic, which went down on April 15, 1912 after striking an iceberg on its first voyage, from Southampton to New York.

Palmer said the new ship would be a tribute to the spirit of the men and women who worked on the original, which sank with the loss of 1,514 passengers and crew. "These people produced work that is still marvelled at more than 100 years later and we want that spirit to go on for another 100 years," he said.

Titanic was commissioned by White Star Line and was the largest liner in the world at the time.

Palmer said he has established his own shipping company, Blue Star Line, with the new vessel having the same specifications as its predecessor -- 270 metres long, 53 metres high and weighing some 40,000 tonnes.

It will have 840 rooms and nine decks with design work in conjunction with an historical research team underway. No figure was given on how much it would cost.

Arrests, raids

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last of the two back-to-back shutdowns called by the BNP-led opposition alliance to protest the disappearance of its leader M Ilias Ali.

Earlier, during the hartal hours and on Sunday night, law enforcers rounded up 10 opposition men, including former student leader Kamruzzaman Ratan -- a close associate of Ilias Ali -- and former deputy minister Sirajul Haque.

In the early hours yesterday, police raided BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's Uttara residence. In the afternoon, they swooped on standing committee member Mirza Abbas' house at South Shahjahanpur.

Unlike on other hartal days, Fakhrul and other top leaders were not seen in the party's central office at Nayapaltan yesterday. They had gone into hiding fearing arrests in two cases filed for explosions in the secretariat compound and the torching of buses on Sunday, insiders said.

Fakhrul and several senior leaders of the BNP and its allies are accused in the two cases, filed on Sunday night. Yesterday's lockdown ended without any major incidents of violence with a thin presence of opposition pickets on the streets.

The main opposition party termed the cases against its leaders "ill-motivated" and called a countrywide demonstration for tomorrow in protest at the raids and filing of the cases.

Hours before his arrest, Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan office said fresh agitation programmes would be announced from a protest rally tomorrow.

Asking the government to withdraw the cases, party's senior leader Moudud Ahmed at the briefing said cases and raids would not be able to weaken the agitation and that the government would be removed through a movement.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Home Shamsul Haque Tuku at a briefing at his office said the BNP leaders were named in the cases on the basis of intelligence and more opposition leaders would be accused if their names came up.

He claimed the violence during Sunday's hartal took place on instructions of the BNP high-ups.

Political tensions have been running high since the disappearance of Ilias Ali, an organising secretary of BNP and also a former lawmaker, and his driver around midnight of April 17 from the capital's Banani area.

On April 19, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia alleged some government agencies had picked up Ilias Ali. On the same day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Ilias might be hiding himself on Khaleda Zia's instructions.

Two weeks on, law enforcers are yet to find the two.

In protest at the incident, BNP enforced back-to-back countrywide hartals across the country from April 22 to 24.

RAIDS, CASES AND ARRESTS

The law enforcers raided Mirza Fakhrul's Uttara residence early yesterday. However, Fakhrul was not home.

Considering the distance between his house and the party office, he usually spends the night before a BNP-enforced hartal day at places adjacent to the Nayapaltan office, party sources said.

Police scaled the boundary wall of Fakhrul's house around 4:30am and knocked on the door. Rahat Ara Begum, his wife, opened the door and allowed the law enforcers in. They combed through all the rooms before they left, Rahat told The Daily Star.

Police also raided BNP leader Mirza Abbas' South Shahjahanpur residence yesterday afternoon to arrest him in connection with the case filed for torching of buses. He was not home at the time either.

Afroza Abbas, wife of the BNP leader, said some 25



Ruhul Kabir Rizvi

cops entered her house around 2:30pm and wanted to know the whereabouts of her husband. The team then searched the house for nearly 30 minutes before leaving.

Police also searched the house of Khairul Kabir Khokon and his wife Shirin Sultana's at the capital's Khilgaon. Both of them are former lawmakers.

A raid was also conducted at BNP leader Habib-un-Nabi Soheli's house in the capital.

In a late night development, police raided the house of Jubo Dal president Moazzem Hossain Alal's Lalmatia residence in the capital around 11:00pm yesterday, when he was not home.

Earlier on Sunday night Tejgaon police filed a case against 44 leaders and activists of the BNP-led 18-party alliance for torching a vehicle near the Prime Minister's Office that day.

The accused include Mirza Fakhrul, party standing committee members Mirza Abbas, Goyeshwar Chandra Roy and Hannan Shah, party Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, party lawmaker Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee, and Liberal Democratic Party President Oli Ahmed.

On the same day, Shabbagh police accused 28 opposition leaders in a case in connection with the "bomb" blasts on the secretariat compound, with Mirza Fakhrul the main accused.

CHIEF JUSTICE REJECTS APPEAL

The chief justice yesterday turned down an appeal to constitute a special High Court bench for an urgent hearing on bail petitions of five top BNP leaders accused in the two cases.

The five are Mirza Fakhrul, Khondker Mosharraf Hossain, MK Anwar, Sadeque Hossain Khoka and Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

A group of senior pro-BNP lawyers led by Moudud Ahmed and Zainul Abedin made the appeal, meeting Chief Justice Md Muzammel Hossain at his Supreme Court office yesterday afternoon.

Zainul Abedin told The Daily Star that the chief justice refused to constitute a special HC bench as the court hours had expired by the time they made the request.

"The chief justice, however, advised us to move the bail petitions before a regular bench of the High Court on Wednesday (tomorrow)."

He added they will place the petitions before the HC tomorrow.

THE HARTAL

Yesterday, all educational institutions, business establishments and most shops and shopping malls by the major thoroughfares remained closed. The government offices remained opened.

The city started to get back to normalcy in the afternoon, with the opposition not declaring any more shutdowns.

On Wednesday, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday issued a four-day ultimatum to the government to locate Ilias Ali and his driver, or her party would go for tougher agitation.

The BNP-led 18-party alliance called the back-to-back shutdowns on Saturday afternoon.

Police picked up former deputy minister for health Sirajul Haque on his arrival in front of BNP's Nayapaltan office yesterday around 7:40am.

A running battle took place after pro-hartal activists brought out a procession and were jointly resisted by Bangladesh Chhatra League members and law enforcers at Adabor around 7:00am,

leaving one injured. Police picked up one from the spot. Pickets exploded five cocktails at different areas in the city.

Like recent hartals, the BNP headquarters remained cordoned off since the morning. Law enforcers did not allow party leaders and activists to hold processions or rallies.

Large contingents of law enforcers were seen patrolling the main thoroughfare and key points of the capital.

Most passenger buses and private cars stayed off roads fearing vandalism. A few CNG-run autorickshaws were seen on major roads of the city.

At least 15 buses started from the city's Sayedabad Bus Terminal for Comilla and Narsingdi in the morning. There was no report of any long-route bus leaving the other terminals in the capital.

BNP BRIEFING

Moudud Ahmed, a member of BNP standing committee, said filing cases against the party leaders and activists will not weaken the opposition movement.

"The government is committing crimes one after another; it is only a matter of time before it will fall," he said during a press conference at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

Asked about the whereabouts of Mirza Fakhrul, Moudud, skirting around the question, said two cases had been filed against the acting secretary general.

To a query on alleged involvement of the accused leaders in violence, Moudud replied, "Top leaders like Fakhrul can never be associated with crimes like vandalism or bomb explosion."

LDP President Oli Ahmed in a statement said he has been on a tour in Chittagong and Cox's Bazar since April 26 to attend some family programmes. "It's really funny that cases have been filed against me while I'm not even in the capital."

Over 100 dead

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As rescuers struggled in heavy rain to find survivors weeping relatives lined the shores of the fast-flowing Brahmaputra river in Assam state, desperate for news of family members onboard the vessel.

It was carrying around 350 men, women and children and police said some 150 people were rescued or swam to safety after the accident, which occurred as torrential pre-monsoon rains lashed the region.

The death toll could make the ferry sinking one of the worst in recent memory in South Asia, where such disasters are common due to lax safety standards and overloading.

"A storm split the steamer into two," Assam state police chief JN Choudhury told AFP.

"Rescue workers along with villagers have recovered about 105 bodies from the shores of the river," said PC Haloi, police chief of Dhubri district, from where the boat set out. "The fate of around 100 others is not known."

The overcrowded double-decker ferry had no lifebelts and Rahul Karmakar, who witnessed the sinking, told AFP: "I could see people being swept away as the river current was very strong."

He added that "chances of survival seem to be remote" in the river, swollen by the heavy storm.

Rescuers struggled to find survivors but their efforts were hampered by high winds, torrential rains and darkness.

Local fishermen, who live with their families in tiny hamlets stretching along the Brahmaputra -- which has a reputation as a treacherous, turbulent waterway -- combed the shores for survivors as night fell.

"The weather is very bad there. It is making the rescue efforts very difficult," state Transport Minister Chandan Brahma told AFP in Assam's main commercial city Guwahati.

Strong winds had uprooted trees, blocking roads leading to the disaster site and preventing some rescue teams from reaching the area, said officials. More rain was forecast for the area on Tuesday.

Luna to meet

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said the press secretary to PM.

The premier will meet Luna tomorrow at 6:00pm in Gono Bhaban.

Earlier yesterday, during a press briefing at her Banani residence, Luna said, "I earnestly request the prime minister to give us an opportunity to meet her."

Ilias' two sons and daughter were also present at the briefing.

"Please rescue Ilias at any cost," she urged the PM in a written statement, adding that the government could take legal action against Ilias if there were any allegations against him.

She said if her husband had been detained for interrogation, the family should have been informed of it.

Claiming that she had come to know about different things through newspapers, Luna said, "If there is any condition, please let us know. We want him back alive under any conditions."

BNP Organising Secretary Ilias Ali, 51, also a former lawmaker from Sylhet, and his driver Ansar Ali went missing from the capital's Banani area around midnight on April 17.

"We are living in uncertainty and feeling insecure. I can't even dare to send my daughter to school. I can't describe how worried I am about them [the children]," said Ilias' wife at the press briefing.

Rangpur Medical

FROM PAGE 20
Chase and counter chase with sticks, iron rods and hockey sticks also took place between the Shibir and Chhatra League activists following the incident.

Dormitory sources said many students were injured during the half-an-hour chaos while Rangpur Kotwali police claimed that none was hurt.

Altab Hossain, officer-in-charge of the Kotwali police station, said they had searched the dormitory and picked up 30 people for interrogation. "We are trying to find out those who had been involved in the violence," he said.

According to students, a group of Shibir activists swooped on several dormitory rooms that belonged to Chhatra League activists and beat up the inmates.

However, Shibir sources claimed that the rooms earlier belonged to them.

Brutal murder

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(DMCH) where doctors declared Nazrul dead.

The condition of his wife Selina Huq, 50, was stated to be critical as she suffered several stab injuries to her head and different parts of the body. Nazrul's nephew Enamul Huq, 32, suffered injuries to his hand. He was given first aid.

Police detained four tenants of Nazrul's house and three other neighbours.

Injured Selina told The Daily Star that the attackers swooped on them while they were asleep. "I and my husband were sleeping in our room on the first floor. The attackers were stabbing and saying that they had come to finish off us."

"The criminals also attacked Enamul as he came to save us," she said. At one stage, Enamul jumped off the window.

Local people came forward when he cried out for help. By this time, the attackers fled away.

Asked, Selina said they went into sleep around 11:30pm and they did not know how the criminals entered their house.

Responding to another query, Selina said there was a feud over the boundary of their house with their neighbour Kamal Hossain, who she alleged might have arranged the attacks.

A relative of Selina said, "Six months earlier, Kamal had injured Selina and her daughter Farzana Huq Lopa. A general diary was filed in this connection."

After the death of Nazrul, his daughter filed a case accusing Kamal and three of his family members, five tenants of Nazrul's house and three other unidentified people.

Inspector Shahadat Hossain of Badda Police Station said they detained Kamal, Amirullah, Abdul Kahar, Rizia, Abu Raihan and two others in this connection.