

Protesters march in Montreal for democracy

AFP, Montreal

Some ten thousand protesters on foot, bicycle, skateboard or rollerblades, crossed Montreal late Saturday to the deafening din of pots, fog horns and whistles.

Some carried Quebec flags, others red flags and placards denouncing a special law passed a week ago to limit the right to protest.

The law sought to clamp down on the student protests by requiring organizers to give police at least eight hours advance warning of times and locations of demonstrations, with big fines for failure to do so.

Authorities have used the emergency law to declare protests illegal, clearing the way for police to disperse protesters.

5 opposition MPs get bail

FROM PAGE 1

Rejected bail by the magistrate and sessions judge's courts, 34 opposition leaders submitted 16 bail prayers before the HC yesterday.

But the HC granted bail only to six lawmakers. They are BNP Standing Committee Member MK Anwar, Joint Secretary General Mahub Uddin Khokon and Student Affairs Secretary Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Anne, Liberal Democratic Party President Oli Ahmed and Bangladesh Jatiya Party President Andalib Rahman Partha.

They might be released today if the jail authority receives necessary documents of the bail order, pro-opposition lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder told The Daily Star.

The HC bench of Justice Salma Masud Chowdhury and Justice FRM Nazmul Ahsan came up with the order and the rule after holding separate hearings on the 16 petitions.

The bench yesterday fixed

today for hearings on the bail petition of Sadeque Hossain Khoka, another BNP leader accused in the same case.

Rafique-ul Huq, Moudud Ahmed, Khandker Mahub Hossain, Zainul Abedin and some other lawyers prayed to the HC bench to grant bail to all the accused leaders on different grounds.

Additional Attorney General MK Rahman said the "parliamentary privileges" are the immunities enjoyed by lawmakers. They cannot be arrested in seven days before the start of a parliament session and in seven days of its culmination.

The budget session of the JS commenced yesterday.

Also yesterday, detectives submitted a supplementary charge sheet before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court against Abdul Jabbar, general secretary of the pro-jamaat body Islami Chhatra Shibir, in the arson case.

With the additional charge sheet, a total of 46 leaders of the BNP-led 18-

party alliance have been made accused in the case. Jabbar was named in the first information report (FIR).

The investigation officer also appealed to the court to issue an arrest warrant against Jabbar, who went into hiding after the filing of the case. The court fixed June 6 for the hearing on the IO's appeal.

BNP DEMO
The Dhaka city BNP yesterday afternoon staged a rally before the party's Nayapalton headquarters in the capital, demanding the release of the detained opposition leaders.

Addressing the gathering, BNP leader Moudud Ahmed said government agents had torched the bus only to harass BNP leaders by filing false cases.

"Five leaders got bail and rest of the leaders will get bail next week," he, however, said.

"No election will be allowed under a political government," he said. Addressing the prime minister, he said, "Make an

announcement of a non-party neutral government. Otherwise you will be forced to do that through a mass uprising."

The BNP also announced that the 18-party alliance from today will launch a nationwide campaign to mobilise public support for their movement. It will continue till June 10, the opposition-set deadline for the restoration of caretaker government system.

BNP leaders Abdul Moyeen Khan, Selima Rahman, Abdullah Al Noman, Mohammad Shahjahan and Zainul Abidin Faroque and Jamaat leader Mujibur Rahman, among others, spoke on the occasion with city BNP Members' Secretary Abdus Salam in the chair.

Earlier in the morning, addressing a human chain in front of the national press club yesterday, Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Faroque said, "We cannot go to the House while our lawmakers are in jail."

Tragedy thrust upon them

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Rehabilitation (Nitor) Hospital informed his family that the spread of infection from his severely damaged leg might threaten his life.

A third year student of Construction Technology at Bangladesh-Swedish Polytechnic Institute (BSPI), Jibon is among 14 activists of Pahari Chhatra Parishad (PCP) injured on May 20 when unidentified assailants hurled a bomb at a group of PCP activists after they attended a council meeting.

Mongsa Ching Marma, 20, later succumbed to his injuries at Chittagong Medical College Hospital last Tuesday.

Critically injured Jibon, Babu Dhan Chakma and Kamonashish Chakma were shifted to Pangu Hospital from Chittagong Medical College and Hospital (CMCH) last Monday.

Jibon's brother Robindra Chakma told The Daily Star on Saturday that the doctors had talked to the family about his

brother's health situation. "Life is more valuable than a leg," Robindra quoted Jibon as saying when he was told of the probable amputation.

Prof Dr KH Abdul Awal Rizvi, director of Nitor - popularly known as Pangu Hospital - told The Daily Star on Saturday that Jibon had already undergone two surgeries.

"We are trying to save his leg but we may have to decide to amputate it from his knee during the surgery depending on the situation that arises."

"It was our dream that Jibon would become an engineer. This incident has not only changed his life but all our family's aspirations too," said Robindra, whose parents are farmers.

The conditions of Babu Dhan Chakma and Kamonashish Chakma are stable now but they have to go undergo further treatment for a long period, family members said.

Kamonashish, a classmate

of Jibon, lost four toes of his left leg and had injuries caused to his hands and legs.

"We are concerned whether he will be able to sit for the coming examinations to be held within a month and a half," his brother Deba Priyo Chakma said. "The incident has left him with severe trauma."

Kamonashish was grief stricken when he spoke to this correspondent.

"I did not want to harm any one. I just wanted to work to uphold the human rights of my community and that is why I joined that event," he said.

"I want a proper investigation and exemplary punishment of those responsible," the 21-year old said.

Babu Dhan Chakma, general secretary of PCP of BSPI unit, also demanded exemplary punishment of those responsible for the heinous attack and proper implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) peace accord.

Tender mishandling costs govt dearly

FROM PAGE 1

The project would have been implemented as per the original estimate by now had the authorities not made a controversial selection in the first tender floated in 2009. In response to that tender, the Egcb had received four offers ranging from \$177m to \$270m.

When the tender was floated, the WB gave a condition that it would not approve bids of any bidder using Siemens equipment against which it (WB) was investigating corruption charges. Despite knowing this condition, the Egcb selected Chinese bidder Sinohydro that proposed to use Siemens equipment. Sinohydro was represented in that tender by Sahco.

This led to disagreements with the WB, and the Egcb was forced to go for a re-tender in late 2010.

Fund crunch

On December 23, 2010, two Spanish companies--Isolux with Samsung and Cobra -- submitted bids for the project. Cobra made an offer \$40 m lower than Isolux's \$41m, but it was disqualified on grounds of an "incomplete" offer.

On the other hand, Isolux-Samsung fell short in the experience criterion of the bid. The terms demanded the bidders have the experience of setting up a plant of no less than 300 MW capacity. But the joint venture's highest experience is building a 280MW plant.

The Egcb at first disqualified it and then changed its decision saying that the project needed to be implemented urgently. Disqualifying the joint venture would lead to re-tender for project, it said.

With none to compete, Isolux-Samsung's offer was

selected and the authorities asked the WB to increase its financing to cover the extra cost sought by the offer.

In August last year, the Egcb secured the WB's conditional clearance for the selection. But the bank said nothing about enhancing its financial support.

In February, the power ministry wrote to the Planning Commission explaining the financial deficit of the project, stating that the \$194 million has to be collected from other donors or paid from the government fund. It mentioned that since it would take a long time to secure the money from donors, the Planning Commission may consider arranging fund from the government to save time, and approve the revised project proposal.

In April, the Executive Committee of National

Economic Council (Ecne) approved the revised proposal with the option of arranging the \$194 m either from the government or any donor or from government to government loan.

Egcb chief Mostafa Kamal explained that the government had no option but to implement the power project to address the power crisis. "The World Bank has not shut the door. It just has not said anything about it yet. We want to proceed with the project," he said when contacted.

He dismissed that the Egcb itself will provide the \$194 million. "We don't have that money. Egcb has just started earning money from February."

Kamal pointed out that the project cost is reasonable. "The per-megawatt cost stands around \$1 m, which is not high. They are

using a costly latest generator which will be very much gas efficient. It will generate 218 MW power using 50 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas, and its heat will be used to produce the remaining 117 MW power," he said.

Criticism & Sahco
Many officials and industry operators are surprised at the hefty additional financial arrangement by the government when it is keeping many fuel-based power plants shut to save money. Fund crunch is also compelling the government to delay payment to many rental power companies for power purchase.

To push through the power projects amid fund crisis, the government even opted for asking the bidders to arrange the finance, and received good response to several big power tenders.

Usually, in cases of big price difference, the government goes for re-tender.

In mid-2009, Petrobangla cancelled a \$141 million tender for installing three gas compressors arguing that it did not have more than \$50 m for the project. Back then, the government did not move to arrange additional funding for this vital project to improve gas supply pressure in the country. Cancellation of the tender was however bitterly criticised.

Sources are now saying that in case of Siddhirganj, things are different because of Sahco.

The WB last year suspended its loans for the Padma bridge project pointing fingers at then communications minister Abul Hossain and others, and alleging that Sahco was seeking bribes from bidders. The

allegation against the minister led to his removal from the communications ministry.

Sahco is involved in representing the winning bidders in two other power projects - a 150 MW project in Sirajganj and a 150 MW one in Khulna. Each of these tender processes faced various allegations against the winning bidders.

Besides, a 300 MW power project in Ghorashal was cancelled after three rounds of tenders because procedural anomalies in selecting the winning bidder represented by Sahco.

Abul Hossain defends Sahco

When The Daily Star asked Syed Abul Hossain whether he has influenced the government to provide the \$194 million for the project, the science and ICT minister said he has no involvement in business as he resigned from

his company Sahco in January 2009.

Advising this correspondent to talk to the chairman and managing director of Sahco about the matter, the minister wanted to know why he was asked about anything concerning Sahco or its business activities.

He said, "There are many qualified persons in Sahco who can speak on the issue. I'm a minister and I have no involvement in business."

Abul Hossain claimed

Sahco is the top most power generation company in the country since 1975, and it could get involved in any power project on its own merit.

He said generally the lowest bidder gets a job after scrutiny by different government agencies, and there were no irregularities in this case.

Join JS, propose polls system

FROM PAGE 1

government to respond. I can even organise a discussion on the proposals here," Hamid said, responding to a statement independent lawmaker Fazlul Azim had made on a point of order.

The Speaker proposed that he could also help the opposition and treasury benches to arrange discussions in any room inside the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

"A solution might come out of lively discussions," he said, adding that he could, however, do nothing if the opposition kept making speeches outside parliament.

Earlier, taking the floor on a point of order, Fazlul Azim said the nation would face dire consequences if the ongoing political standoff over the issue of a caretaker government continued.

In his opening speech at the budget session that began yesterday afternoon, the Speaker said lawmakers could discuss any matter in parliament and an understanding or decision could be made on national issues through discussion.

His appeal to make parliament more effective

comes at a time when the opposition is boycotting its proceedings to protest against its top leaders being sent to jail in an arson case.

"In democratic countries all over the world, parliament is the centre of discussion on all national and international issues. Similarly, in Bangladesh parliament is the centre for the government and MPs for all activities," he said observed.

Opposition Chief Whip Zainul Abidin Faroque yesterday said the BNP and its allies would not join the budget session while the top leaders of the 18-party alliance were in jail.

"How will we join the parliament session when our colleagues have been put behind bars?" he said at a human chain before the Jatiya Press Club yesterday.

BNP lawmakers MK Anwar, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee and Mahubuddin Khokon, LDP President Col (ret'd) Oli Ahmad MP and BJP Chairman Andaleev Rahman Partha MP have been sent to jail in a case filed for torching a bus near the Prime Minister's Office

during the opposition's hartal on April 29.

In his brief speech, the Speaker hoped all MPs would participate in parliamentary proceedings and debate on various issues.

"People expect that parliament will be the centre of all political activities. So, all MPs must be parliament-oriented. And the national interest must get priority over personal and partisan interests," he said.

"The more parliament is made effective, the more democracy is strengthened."

He said elected representatives have a responsibility to practise and promote democracy and to make people aware of national and international issues. Democracy would have to be nourished wholeheartedly and spread to the grassroots and it should be reflected in party and parliamentary business, the speaker said.

"It is our duty to work towards fulfilling the expectations of the people who elected us," he said. He said it was the duty of the MPs to ensure that the money allocated in the annual budget was spent on the people's

welfare.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith is expected to place the national budget in the House on June 7 for fiscal year 2012-2013.

Prior to the beginning of the budget session, the Business Advisory Committee of parliament at a meeting chaired by the Speaker decided that the House would hold a 40-hour-long discussion on the proposed budget, expected to be passed on June 28.


Meanwhile, Minister of State for Science and Technology Yeafesh Osman placed a bill to enact a new law, "Bangladesh Atomic Energy Control", by scrapping the law made earlier in 1993. He said the 1993 law went against international convention.

The bill was sent to the related parliament committee for scrutiny.

On behalf of the law minister, State Minister for Law Qamrul Islam placed in parliament two ordinances promulgated by the president earlier, including one for amending the International Crimes (Tribunals) Act.

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