

Morsi's opponents to boycott Egypt polls

AGENCIES

Egypt's main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front, yesterday said it will boycott upcoming parliamentary elections due to a lack of guarantees of a transparent process.

"The decision of the Front, unanimously, is to boycott the elections," member Sameh Ashour told reporters after a meeting of the NSF, which groups mainly liberal and leftist parties and movements.

Ashour said the decision came after its demands, including the formation of a new government "to save the country", had been ignored.

He said the lack of guarantees for a transparent process also contributed to the coalition's decision.

The NSF said it would also boycott a national dialogue called for by Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, which was to be aired live on television on Tuesday

afternoon according to the presidency.

The staggered parliamentary elections are due to begin on April 22 and end two months later.

With deep grass roots networks, the Islamists have won all of the elections held since Mubarak was swept from power in a popular uprising that for a while brought Egyptians together in a display of unity rarely seen since then.

Divisions between the Islamists and their opponents have widened since Morsi won last year's presidential election. Tensions spilt into lethal street violence late last year when the president was accused of staging a power grab - accusations dismissed by the Islamists as propaganda.

Seeking to convince the opposition to take part, Morsi had invited them to talks on Tuesday to address concerns about the vote. The NSF said it would not attend. "We tell President Morsi: talk with yourself and your party," Ashour said.



A Palestinian girl carries a poster of Arafat Jaradat, who died in an Israeli prison, during a protest at Erez border crossing between Israel and the northern Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

PRISONER DEATH ROW Gaza rocket explodes in Israel

REUTERS, Jerusalem

A rocket fired from Gaza exploded in Israel yesterday, the first such attack since a November truce and an apparent show of solidarity with West Bank protests after the death of a Palestinian in an Israeli jail.

Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, a militant group in Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's West Bank-based Fatah movement, claimed responsibility for the rocket strike, the Palestinian Ma'an news agency said. No casualties were reported.

Hamas, the Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip, said it was investigating. There was no military response from Israel, hours after the rocket slammed into a road near its southern city of Ashkelon.

The rocket was the first to hit Israel since a November 21 truce brokered by Egypt that ended eight days of cross-border air strikes and missile attacks in which 175 Palestinians and six Israelis were killed.

The strike came after a surge of unrest in the occupied West Bank, that has raised fears in Israel of a new Palestinian Intifada (uprising).

On Monday, thousands of Palestinians in the West Bank turned out for the funeral of Arafat Jaradat, 30, who died in disputed circumstances in an Israeli prison on Saturday.

Israeli police shot and wounded five Palestinian youths during confrontations in Bethlehem and outside a West Bank prison later the same day, leaving a 15-year-old boy in critical condition.

Egypt balloon crash kills 18

REUTERS, Cairo

At least 18 people, most of them Asian and European tourists, were killed when a hot air balloon crashed yesterday near the ancient Egyptian town of Luxor following a mid-air gas explosion, officials said.

The balloon came down in farmland a few kilometres from the Valley of the Kings and pharaonic temples that draw tourists to Luxor. Rescue workers gathered the remains of the dead from the field where the charred remains of the balloon, gas canisters and other pieces of burnt wreckage landed.

One Egyptian was also killed, Health Minister Mohamed Mostafa Hamed told Reuters, listing the others killed as tourists from Japan, China, France, Britain and Hungary. Earlier, officials had said all the dead were tourists.

The pilot survived by jumping from the basket when it was 10-15 metres from the ground, said Ahmed About, head of an association representing Luxor balloon operators. Two other survivors, both British, were being treated at Luxor hospital, said Mohamed Mustafa, a doctor at Luxor hospital. The fatalities were caused by burns and by the impact, he said.

"We believe a small number of British nationals are involved in an incident in Luxor this morning," Britain's Foreign Office said in an emailed statement. The Japanese embassy in Cairo said it believed four Japanese had been aboard and had sent staff to Luxor to confirm.

Sri Lanka Tamils raped, tortured in detention

REUTERS, New Delhi

Sri Lanka's security forces have used rape to torture and extract confessions from suspected Tamil separatists almost four years after the country's civil war ended, Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in a report yesterday.

The rights group documented 75 cases of predominately Tamil men and women who said they were held in Sri Lanka detention centres and repeatedly raped and sexually abused by the military, police and intelligence officials.

The victims - now living as asylum seekers, most of them in Britain - said once they confessed to being a member of the Tamil Tiger rebel group, the abuse generally stopped and they were allowed to escape by paying a bribe, before fleeing abroad.

"We found that rape was used to secure some sort of confession, but also as a political tool to punish people," Meenakshi Ganguly, the rights group's South Asia director, told a news conference in New Delhi.

"These were people who had some connection with the Tigers ... who were forced to sign confessions, and only then would the rapes stop."

Ganguly said sexual abuse was only one form of torture that the people suffered: "They were also severely tortured, burnt by cigarettes and hung upside down."

Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to New Delhi said he had no evidence to suggest the allegations of abuse, which the rights group said occurred from 2006 to 2012, were true.

Ghulam Azam aided attacks

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He said Azam actually supported all the activities of the Pakistani army by assisting the operations of the military-backed government against the Bangalees. As part of their assistance, auxiliary forces -- Peace Committee, Razakar, Al-Badr and Al-shams -- were formed in a planned way, the prosecutor argued.

"So, it is clear that Azam was involved in all the activities [genocide, mass killings and other war crimes] committed by the Pakistani army and its auxiliary forces during the Liberation War in 1971. Azam could not avoid liabilities of the crimes," Simon added.

In that meeting, Azam also urged the then president Yahya Khan to visit East Pakistan in order to gain the support of the "patriots" of the East. Azam termed his followers patriots.

Quoting newspaper reports, Simon said Azam pinned the blame on "extremists" of the banned Awami League for all the miseries of the country.

In a public gathering at the Baitul Mukarram Mosque on October 16, 1971 the war crimes suspect also stated that Jamaat-e-Islami was working relentlessly through the Peace Committees to establish a civilian government in the country

The prosecutor said such speech shows Azam's association with the criminal activities of the Pakistani army and the Peace Committees.

The prosecution have been placing arguments for the last seven days and would continue with placing the closing argument today.

Earlier in the morning, the three-member tribunal rejected two prayers of

Azam -- bail petition and taking written statement of Prof William Schabas and Gen Jack Deverell as defence testimony.

This is the fourth time the former Jamaat chief's bail petition has been rejected by the tribunal.

Earlier on February 20, Azam's counsel Tajul Islam filed a bail petition to let the family members take care of the accused, who has been suffering from old-age complications.

Countering the petition, the prosecution argued that there was no guarantee whether Azam would get well after returning home from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), where he has been undergoing treatment.

The tribunal ordered the BSMMU authorities to ensure proper treatment of the accused.

Inactive for 38 years

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There is, however, one instance of getting solution to an issue of public importance in the eighth parliament in 2005 following a petition by Abul Hossain, the then president of the Sathkira Bar.

In line with recommendations of the then Petition Committee, a road inside the Sathkira TV relay station was opened for public until construction of an alternative road.

Petition committees play important roles in ensuring public participation in the law-making process in many democracies including in Australia, Germany, India, Scotland and the UK, said officials in the parliament secretariat.

According to the House Rules of Procedure, anyone with consent of the Speaker

can submit a petition, giving his opinion or feedback on any bill placed in the House. Petitions can also be filed on issues pending in the House or any other matters related to public interest.

Under the rules, the Petition Committee headed by the Speaker would inform the House about the petition and recommend actions. This is an all-MP committee, and ministers cannot be its members.

Statistics show 149 petitions related to public issues were submitted to the Petition Committee in the last 38 years. Of them, 12 were filed during the present (ninth) parliament that began in January 2009.

The eighth parliament where the BNP-Jamaat alliance had majority seats, accepted one petition out of 20 submitted.

Earlier, the seventh parliament accepted two petitions and the fifth parliament 17 petitions.

Records of the meetings held by the committee during successive parliaments are also very poor. No meeting was held during the first four parliaments from 1973 to 1990. During the next four parliaments from 1991 to 2006, the committee sat nine times.

The Petition Committee of the current parliament has yet to hold its first meeting.

One of the members of the committee is not happy about such inaction. "You better talk to the Speaker," he told this correspondent, requesting anonymity.

Speaker Abdul Hamid said, "How we can hold meetings when we have not received any petition for discussion?"

Contacted, BNP lawmaker Moudud Ahmed said the Petition Committee had an important role in holding parliament accountable through people's participation.

"But unfortunately, the committee exists only on paper. And this trend had been prevailing for the past 38 years for which we, the MPs, parliament and the successive governments, are responsible," he said.

Asked what steps his party had taken when in power, he said no government in the past had done enough to make the committee functional.

"We will have to tell people that they have such a right in parliament. But lawmakers themselves would have to be more serious about the importance of the committee," he added.

Pro-BNP, Jamaat Mobiles

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Experience talking at the Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

He said the ability to make objects more 'tangible' will be the next major development in mobile technology. "Computers have to work the way people expect and not the other way round," he told CNN.

Duarte said users' experience of mobile phones has been transformed by being able to 'stroke' screens.

"In the old days we used to be poking at phones," he said. "If I were to start poking you, you wouldn't like it, but when you start stroking, it's a totally different message."

"Right now we only recognise a couple of fingers, and on screens that

are small and always in the palm of your hand.

"In the future, we will look at the gestures of your entire body, facial expressions, arms, all of the fingers that you have, and you're going to have screens not just in the palm of your hand, but all around you."

Duarte's team is also believed to be involved in the development of Google's Glass wearable computer.

It will go on sale later this year for under £100, and will offer a way to give consumers the 'virtual reality' experience Duarte referred to.

Google's Android software was used on almost 70 per cent of mobile phones and tablets sold in 2012.

Crew left in the lurch

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government to come to the rescue of the detained crew.

Built in Japan in 1981, the ship named MV Fatahpur Rahman that carry the flag of Panama had started from Myanmar with timber and anchored at Visakhapatnam on October 4, 2012.

Habibur Rahman, captain of the ship, told The Daily Star over the phone that the harbour authorities had denied the ship departure clearance as it did not comply with the required safety measures.

The authorities later verbally informed that there was a case pending

with the Admiralty court of Mumbai High Court. The very court had issued the detention.

"I believe the ship's safety certification documents are forged," said Habibur.

The ship's owner company owned \$2 lakh to a fuel company in Colombo, he continued, it also had dues with a bank, a fuel company and a workshop in Mumbai. They together had filed the case with the Mumbai High Court.

Late in 2010, the Mumbai Port Estate Control authorities had also kept the ship detained for four months, said Habibur, adding that the

owner then got the ship released on a false declaration that said it needed to go to Chittagong port for repairing.

He said the ship actually had sailed to Karachi to pick up cargo and finally went to Chittagong changing its classifications.

Habibur has already contacted the Bangladesh High Commission in Delhi and sought their cooperation.

Captain KM Jasimuddin Sarkar, chief nautical surveyor of Department of Shipping, said the crew onboard needed to file a case either with the marine court or the Admiralty court (a High Court bench)

for their dues and compensation and against the owner's fraudulence.

The Department of Shipping was unaware of the ship's being detained, as none complained about it, he said, adding that they can hardly do anything to rescue the crew as the Indian authorities would not let them leave unless appropriate relievers are provided to man the vessel.

Despite several attempts over the phone the officials of Silvia Ship Management in Chittagong and owner Milon in Singapore could not be reached for their comments.

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