

3-YEAR MANDATORY PARTY MEMBERSHIP

Shujan worried about dropping RPO provision

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shushashoner Jannoy Nagorik (Shujan), a civic body, yesterday expressed concerns regarding dropping a RPO provision, which makes it mandatory for an individual to be a member of a political party for at least three years to contest in the national election from that party.

The parliamentary standing committee on law ministry has recently proposed to drop the provision.

If the provision is scrapped, a person will get the opportunity to change party ahead of the 10th parliamentary election, said a Shujan statement. The existing provision, however, does not apply

for independent candidates.

If the provision is dropped, ill practices such as changing political parties and vote buying will increase, added the statement.

The statement, signed by the body's president M Hafizuddin Khan and secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar, also urged for reintroducing "no vote" in ballot papers.

The Election Commission in July sent a set of proposals to the law ministry for amending the RPO. Following due procedures, Law Minister Shafique Ahmed placed the bill in parliament on September 30. The bill was later sent to the parliamentary body for further scrutiny.

Five killed

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venue, where tens of thousands of people had gathered, police said.

Immediately after the explosion at the railway station, bomb disposal units swept the area and recovered two more crude bombs, Railway Superintendent of Police Upendra Kumar Sinha said, adding a security man was injured while defusing a bomb recovered from the toilet.

People were seen rushing the injured to the hospital as the explosions sparked panic.

Plumes of smoke billowed from a couple of sites even as leaders of India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) addressed the crowd.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh condemned the blasts and appealed for calm. He spoke to Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and asked him to speedily probe the blasts and ensure that perpetra-

tors are punished.

The home ministry has sought a report from the Bihar government on the explosions and sent teams of National Investigation Agency (NIA) and National Security Guard (NSG) to the state.

"I can't say whether it was a terror attack or political conspiracy. Only after the investigation we will be able to tell anything," Union Minister of State for Home RPN Singh said.

Modi later said he was saddened at the blasts. "Blasts in Patna are deeply saddening and unfortunate. Condolences with families of deceased and prayers with injured. I appeal for peace and calm," the Gujarat chief minister tweeted.

Four persons have been detained from different areas of Patna and are being questioned by police, according to Patna Senior Superintendent of Police Manu Maharaj.

Jamaat acts typically

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and Baliapara Bazar.

The attackers also beat up Shakil, 25, and his mother Saleha Begum, 47, at Fakirhat of Zianagar yesterday evening.

In Jessor, BNP and Jamaat activists went inside a highway police outpost in Noapara chasing Alamgir Hossain Shimul, 38, general secretary of Noapara Municipality Jubo League. They hacked him and cut his tendons, a signature of a Shibir attack. Shimul died.

In Chapainawabganj, pro-hartal activists hacked and injured two pro-ruling party Chhatra League activists in Shyampur Bridge area of Shympur upazila.

The injured men were Hasan Ali, 18, and Harun Rashid, 20, of Umarpur of Shympur union. The attackers cut the tendon of Hasan's right leg.

Mizanur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Shympur Police Station and locals said the attack-

ers, armed with sharp weapons, ambushed them near Shyampur Bridge around 11:30am when Hasan and Harun were going to Kansat Bazar on a bicycle.

Locals rushed them to Shibganj Health Complex but as Hasan's condition deteriorated, doctors there sent him to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital.

In Chittagong, Shibir men hacked three pro-ruling party Chhatra League activists, Faruk Hossain, Mohammad Ripon and Rana, at Nizampur of Mirsarai upazila.

Quoting locals, Mohammad Hossain, in charge of Nizampur police outpost, said the trio were having tea at a stall at the village around 6:30pm when 20-30 Shibir men went there in procession and attacked them with sharp weapons.

The three men were admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Hartal exemption

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"We have made the decision considering the concern and security of the students and their guardians over the examination," said Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, joint secretary general of the main opposition party.

But he did not say how the security of the students would be ensured or how the students would get to the examination centres amid such street violence that killed at least five people during hartal hours yesterday.

Hours after Rizvi's announcement, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir came up with another interesting statement at a press conference at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

Asked who would be responsible if the candidates come under attack, he said, "The government will be responsible for that kind of incidents."

On the first day of the 60-hour shutdown yesterday, the BNP-Jamaat men went berserk across the country, vandalising houses, shops, vehicles and trains. They did not spare even ambulance, medicine vans and newspaper-carrying vehicles that were out of the hartal's purview.

At least seven journalists were injured across the country when hartal supporters attacked them despite them showing the identity cards. Moreover, many Hajj pilgrims got stuck at the airport as they did not get vehicles to go home.

Amid such circumstances, guardians and students termed the BNP announcement bizarre and questioned the justification for such exemption when everyone's life is at risk.

They said such comments from political party leaders were unacceptable.

"Who will take the responsibility if we come under attack while going to the examination centres? And how do the pickets know the examinees," said Ayesha Tabassum, a guardian whose daughter is sitting O-level examination.

Mahfuzur Rahman, another guardian whose son is sitting for the exams from Scholastica, said: "It's a ridiculous announcement. Should we hang a banner in front of the vehicle that my child is an examinee?"

"Do the politicians ever care or think before announcing such destructive political programmes like hartal that they will put the students' education life in peril?"

Then again, uncertainty over rescheduling the examinations still remains as it is not yet certain if the Cambridge International Examination (CIE) Board will reschedule those.

Guardians fear that if the board does not take the examinations, the session will be lost and the students will have to wait for the next slot to take the test.

"The decision of postponement was taken considering the security of all, including examinees and examiners. We have notified it to the board and if the board reschedules the examinations, we will inform the students," said Monzoor Hussain Mamun, school examinations manager of the British Council.

The October-November session of the O- and A-level exams under the CIE Board started on October 7 at three centres in the capital. The exams, administered by the British Council in Bangladesh, are scheduled to end on November 29.

US, Japan worried

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the ruling and opposition parties to show restraint, and express their views peacefully.

"America's message to all political players is that violence is not a part of the democratic process and is not acceptable. While engaging in peaceful protest is a fundamental democratic right, we firmly believe that violence is never the answer," said US Ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena.

In a press statement yesterday, he said: "We are concerned by the violence and deaths that have occurred. We look to the Government of Bangladesh to ensure the safety of all its citizens and encourage all Bangladeshis to peacefully express their views. We call on all parties to ensure that they use peaceful means to pursue their objectives."

Ambassador of Japan Shiro Sadoshima in a separate message on the day said he was deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence and hostility in Dhaka

NIZAMI'S TRIAL

Tribunal irked by absence of defence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The International Crimes Tribunal-1, irked by the absence of defence counsels, yesterday adjourned the proceeding of the case against Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Motiur Rahman Nizami on one day.

"Will the court sit idle if hartal continues throughout the week? How could you expect the court to sit idle for three days?" said the tribunal when a defence counsel prayed for a three-day adjournment.

Nizami's son Mohammad Nazibar Rahman, fourth defence witness, was scheduled to make the rest of his deposition, but neither he nor the conducting defence lawyers appeared before the three-member tribunal.

On Friday, the BNP-led 18-party, of which Jamaat is a crucial component, called a 60-hour hartal that began yesterday.

Junior defence counsel Asad Uddin submitted an adjournment petition and said his senior colleague Mizanul Islam could not appear due to personal difficulties.

Asad sought an adjournment for three days until October 30.

"Mizanul Islam could have finished it [taking deposition of the defence witness] on Thursday. He didn't do it. Now we understand that he was aware of the hartal," said Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim. His observation was supported by other judges.

Justice ATM Fazle Kabir, chairman of the tribunal, said Mizanul Islam was not the only member of the defence. "Where are the rest of the counsels?" he asked.

Asad informed the court that he did not mention about other colleagues, but they too had personal difficulties.

"How did you come?" Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim asked Asad.

Asad replied that he had arrived at the tribunal risking his life. Senior counsels could not move without vehicles, so it was difficult for them, he claimed.

The tribunal wanted to know how senior lawyers came to the High Court, next to the tribunal, on hartal days.

Asad could not give a satisfactory reply, rather said the witness who resided in Banani also could not appear due to hartal.

The tribunal said it would provide police protection to Mizanul Islam, if he wanted, and adjourned the proceeding for one day.

Nizami, facing 16 war crimes charges for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity during the Liberation War, was produced before the tribunal yesterday.

The tribunal also adjourned the proceeding against Mobarak Hossain until October 30. Defence counsel Ahsanul Huq Hena was supposed to cross-examine the investigation officer but did not turn up.

Junior counsel Tariqul Islam told the tribunal that Hena could not arrive from Chittagong.

AL gears up for polls

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nomination forms to Tk 25,000 from Tk 10,000, parliamentary board member Amir Hossain Amu told The Daily Star after the meeting.

The polls were likely to be held on December 30 or December 31, party insiders claimed.

At the meeting, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said the Awami League's preparation for polls would be completed much earlier so that there could be no conflict among Awami League nomination aspirants.

She told the meeting that distribution of party tickets would be done within a very short period of time as she has already exchanged views with party grassroots from all district and upazila units and was conducting different surveys to learn about the prospective candidates.

Sources said Awami Leaguers' nominations would be made final first and then the nominations of alliance partners would be made through discussions.

A few leaders thanked the premier for making a phone call to BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia inviting her to talks. They criticised Khaleda for not withdrawing the hartal and joining the talks.

The meeting decided to make a huge show of public support on November 3 when the Awami League holds a rally at Suhrawardi Udyan, Amir Hossain Amu said.

metropolitan area and all over Bangladesh.

"Japan, as a long-time friend and important stakeholder of Bangladesh, while condemning any kind of violence and destructive activities, urges the restraint of both ruling and opposition parties so as not to cause any loss on its citizen's safety and welfare over the path of resolving the political confrontation," said the Japanese envoy.

Regarding talks, the US ambassador to Bangladesh said America continues to urge the major parties in Bangladesh to engage in constructive dialogue to find an agreed way forward to hold free, fair and credible elections.

Mozena said he was encouraged by developments, including the recent telephone conversation between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, and hoped these positive developments would culminate soon in a constructive dialogue between the major parties on the best way forward for achieving free, fair and credible elections.

Ambassador of Japan Shiro Sadoshima in a separate message on the day said he was deeply concerned by the continuing escalation of violence and hostility in Dhaka

Rejoinder, our reply

FROM PAGE 16

Any reporting as "unfounded" as it was, motivation was singularly revealing as its only purpose was to malign the good name of this ministry and the reputation of Hon'ble Foreign Minister Dr Dipu Moni, MP.

To put the issues in right perspective, we are hereby placing the facts for the interests of your readers. The Foreign Minister had NOT asked the Director General (External Publicity) to call the concerned Editor, in her presence, which the report specifically mentioned. This is totally unfounded and speculative. The Foreign Minister had only made a query with the respective officer as a follow up to a pending issue.

The report further mentioned that the Foreign Minister expressed her dismay for "failure" of the Director General (Consular & Welfare) to ensure visa/issuance Letter of Introduction promptly for the "party men". This is as imaginative as one could be as the matter is furthest from the truth.

Indeed, it was more than a lie as no such issue was discussed yesterday [October 23]. The fact remains that the Foreign Minister never directed any officer/official to favor any party worker for visa.

It may be mentioned that the ministry has been trying to help all bona fide applicants, irrespective of party affiliation or district identity, to obtain visa as a matter of responsibility. Furthermore, there is not a shred of evidence to substantiate the assertion that foreign mission's in Dhaka expressed their displeasure due to Ministry's frequent persuasion for visa for "ruling party men including those from Chandpur".

The Hon'ble Foreign Minister left the office yesterday to attend an important meeting and it had nothing to do with the issues mentioned in the news item. We hope that the esteemed daily will take the corrective measures and will not stigmatize the ministry in the future on baseless grounds.

Our Reply

Above we reproduced the foreign office rejoinder in full as a courtesy, though its language and content do not entitle it to be so treated.

The Daily Star report was based on eyewitnesses accounts who saw the entire incident that took place at the foreign minister's office on October 23 morning and therefore we find some of the denials outrageous and comments about our report unprofessional.

Our report did not say the DG (EP) called up the editor, as mentioned in the rejoinder. To clarify the point further, the DG (EP) called up the diplomatic correspondent of Daily Manabzamin at 10:11am on October 23 and talked for about 2 minutes.

The Daily Manabzamin had published a report on October 8 titled "Foreign office out of control due to bribes-lobbying".

Following the receipt of the rejoinder, we have further reconfirmed from foreign ministry sources that along with the DG (EP), DG of Consular wing was also called by the minister and given a dressing though the rejoinder calls it a "lie" and "wildest of imaginations".

While the rejoinder denied issuance of Letter of Introduction (LoI) for "party men", and claimed to help all "bona fide applicants", the rejoinder fails to elaborate who these so-called "bona fide" applicants are. The frequency of issuance of such LoI indicates that helping such "bona fide applicants" is a daily affair.

We have further checked with our sources and can say that several foreign missions in Dhaka receive numerous LoI from our foreign ministry, especially for some popular destinations in the region.

In a recent formal communication, the British High Commission in Dhaka stated that they would no longer accept any LoI, but only "Note Verbale".

"The British High Commission continues to accept endorsement of visa applications from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. What we have said is that we require such endorsements to be sent by Note Verbale. That means as a formal communication between governments, rather than the informal practice that had begun of sending letters of introduction," said Warren Daley, the spokesperson of the high commission, to this paper.

The rejoinder did not say anything about the rest of the story.

We stand by our report.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Office of the Project Director

Climate Resilient Participatory Afforestation and Reforestation Project

1st Floor, Banbahan (old), Mohakhali, Dhaka-1212

Dated: 23 October 2013

Invitation for Tenders for Goods (Single Lot)

1	Ministry/Division	Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF)

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