

5 BNP leaders

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court to grant them bail arguing that their (five BNP leaders) names were not included in the first information reports of the cases.

Moreover, two of the accused, Moudud and Anwar, are lawmakers and they are ill. Police didn't seek prior permission from the Speaker to arrest the MPs though parliament has been on a session, added a counsel of the BNP leaders.

The court directed the investigators to submit progress reports on the cases before it.

Pro-BNP lawyers staged demonstrations at the court premises when the BNP leaders were taken to the court.

In the evening, BNP leaders Moudud, Anwar, Rafiqul and Mintoo were sent to Kashimpur jail. The other arrestee Shimul Biswas landed in Dhaka Central Jail.

Moudud, Anwar and Rafiqul were detained in front of Hotel Sonargaon in the capital on Friday night, while the two others were detained outside Khaleda Zia's Gulshan residence early

yesterday.

Motijheel police filed the two cases on September 24 and November 6.

The November 6 case statement said opposition leaders blocked a road at Kamalapur Bazar and blasted crude bombs targeting law enforcers on the hartal day on November 5.

The other case statement said BNP men brought out a procession on September 24 protesting submission of a charge sheet against four Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leaders, including its president, for their involvement in hurling crude bombs at the residence of the information minister.

BNP leaders from the procession vandalised and torched a car and blasted several cocktails in front of Motijheel Ideal School and College, added the case statement.

But the names of the five arrested BNP leaders were not mentioned in the two cases.

Hasina buys

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party's central office at Bangabandhu Avenue.

The forms will be available from 10:00am to 5:00pm every day. Those eligible as per the party constitution and the electoral laws can collect nomination

forms, each of which would cost Tk 25,000.

The aspirants will have to submit the forms at the central office.

Seven booths would be set up in the central office to sell forms for seven divisions. Each booth will be monitored by three central leaders.

Talks in tatters

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to prevent the government from holding the parliamentary election with her alliance not taking part.

Hasina, ruling Awami League-led alliance chief, may go even harder on the opposition and detain more senior leaders to stop the opposition from waging street agitations and to go forward with her plan to hold the general election.

A number of senior leaders of Awami League and BNP yesterday talked to The Daily Star on condition of anonymity and explained the new developments.

"Nobody can stop her [Sheikh Hasina] government from holding the general election by January," said a minister and a seasoned Awami Leaguer.

A BNP policymaker said the detention of senior BNP leaders on Friday infuriated Khaleda and she directed her party leaders yesterday to make the 72-hour hartal, which starts from today, an 84-hour shutdown.

"Now, she wants to wage an all out movement with no let up," the leader said.

The BNP leader said the party national standing committee, chaired by Khaleda, on Thursday had decided on a 72-hour hartal from today and the programme was announced on Friday afternoon.

But a number of Awami League leaders yesterday said the call for strike had led the prime minister and her policymakers to believe that the opposition was not interested in ending the political crisis through talks and that Khaleda was fixated on resisting the polls through agitation.

This prompted Hasina to ask law enforcers to launch the crackdown and detain BNP senior leaders Moudud Ahmed, MK Anwar, Rafiqul Islam Mia, Abdul Awal Mintoo and Khaleda's special assistant Shimul Biswas.

Most of the ruling party policymakers and ministers were in the dark about the arrest of BNP high-ups, some Awami League leaders claimed.

They said the crackdown was intended to weaken the opposition but a number of BNP leaders said the opposition activists have been asked to take to the streets from today with a firm resolve.

A government policymaker said its next course of action would be determined by the opposition's activities. If the BNP continues rampaging on the streets and resorts to vandalism during hartal hours, the government would go for even tougher actions against them and arrest more top leaders.

Khaleda Zia's movements could also be restricted, the government policymaker said.

But, if the BNP observes the hartal peacefully and if the party refrains from flexing its muscles, no further actions would be taken on the government's part.

Some top Awami Leaguers said the government would not allow anyone to harm the environment for the elections. It wants the results to be acceptable to all.

It is now worried about poor voter turnout in the election due to the opposition's street agitations. The government wants to make sure the elections are free, fair and credible and a really high number of voters exercise their franchise.

A large number of the Awami League policymakers view that the arrest of top BNP leaders was not intended to bring about any solution and that it would only deteriorate the political situation and trigger more unrest. They were against the Friday night's crackdown on the opposition.

A top leader of the ruling party who is also very close of the party chief told party colleagues that the recent arrests were not a wise move for the government. The leader knew nothing about the arrests going to be made until they were made.

Many party top leaders think that state of emergency might be declared and the army might be called in after the Election Commission declares the polls schedule.



Arrested senior BNP leaders, from left, Abdul Awal Mintoo, Rafiqul Islam Miah, MK Anwar and Moudud Ahmed sitting inside a prison van as they were taken to court yesterday. The opposition leaders are to stay in jail until the court hears their bail petitions on Thursday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Formal charges

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accused. The court, upon examining all relevant documents, then decides whether to accept the charge(s) or not.

After probing the allegations against Qaisar for 16 months, the war crimes investigation agency said on September 22 that it had found "horrific evidence" of Qaisar's involvement in crimes against humanity and genocide.

Agency officials said he was involved in at least 16 counts of war crimes, including genocide, abduction, murder, confinement, torture and arson. The agency submitted the probe report and other documents to the prosecution on the same day.

International Crimes Tribunal-2 asked the prosecution the next day to press formal charges if any against Qaisar on October 24. As the prosecution failed to submit formal charges on that day, the court fixed today for submission.

Qaisar, 73, a former state minister in military dictator HM Ershad's cabinet,

was arrested in the capital on May 21 following an arrest order of the tribunal. He received bail on August 5 on grounds of poor health.

According to the investigation agency, Qaisar, son of Syed Soeed Uddin Ahmed of Itakhola village of Madhabpur, Habiganj, was a Razakar commander and a member of the local Peace Committee. He guided the Pakistani army in their operations against the Hindus of different villages in Habiganj and Brahmanbaria districts during the war.

The agency said he was involved in two counts of rape, the killing of 526 persons, looting of over a thousand houses and torching of 1,500-1,600 houses during the nine-month-long war.

In a single incident on November 15, 1971, Qaisar along with his force and the Pakistani army killed hundreds of people, looted and torched their houses in about two dozen villages in Brahmanbaria, the probe body said.

Critical view

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(now BGB) despised and envied the more cosseted officers, who were drawn from the regular army. One particular resentment was that paramilitary soldiers could not serve lucrative spells as UN peacekeepers, unlike their army counterparts, said the weekly in its latest edition.

At the end of a high-profile trial, a Dhaka court on November 5 sentenced 152 defendants to death for part in the bloody mutiny that broke out at the BDR headquarters in Dhaka in February, 2009. Hundreds face long jail terms, including civilians convicted of conspiracy.

The executions are unlikely to take place before the general election, expected early in January. The appeals process will take months, read the report.

It added: The verdicts also come as opinion polls show that the opposition BNP, led by Khaleda Zia, is far more popular than Sheikh Hasina's Awami League. Polls suggest support, too, for an independent caretaker government to run the election, to guard against vote-rigging. Sheikh Hasina has refused that, perhaps hoping to provoke a BNP boycott of the poll.

If a boycott takes place, then elections could be delayed and street violence is likely in the next few months. If so, the army, which also has the job of providing security at polling stations, would play a decisive political role. Sheikh Hasina "has no interest in alienating it," said The Economist.

Hasina lashes out at Khaleda

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request and announced hartal from November 4, the day the JSC exams were scheduled to begin," she said.

"She is a mother . . . didn't it strike her that she should not cause trouble for the children, rather she should make arrangements so that they can sit for the exams peacefully," said Hasina.

By enforcing shutdowns, Khaleda Zia gave people nothing but deaths, said Hasina.

She mentioned the killing of 14-year-old Monir Hossain, who was set on fire by pro-hartal pickets during the opposition's shutdown on November 4 in Gazipur.

When Monir was burning inside a covered van, BNP-Jamaat men were laughing standing next to the vehicle, said Hasina.

"Could you imagine how cruel they are? Are they human being?"

Joining hands with the BNP, the Jamaat and the Hefajat-e Islam are burning the people to death, she said.

"How those who burn people and torch the holy Quran will protect Islam?" asked the prime minister.

She urged people to vote the AL back to power, saying the country sees huge development when her party is in power.

On the other hand, she said, when the BNP assumes power, the party men amass wealth through corruption and money laundering.

Hasina claimed that Khaleda whitened black money by paying a fine, while her two sons siphoned off crores of taka abroad.

She alleged that Khaleda and her two sons also embezzled the money of an orphanage. "The opposition leader doesn't appear in court for fear of punishment."

On the trial of war criminals, the prime minister said, "We have begun the trial. The tribunals have started delivering verdicts, and Insha'Allah the judgments would be executed."

Earlier, the prime minister inaugurated and laid foundation stones of a number of development projects in Moulvibazar.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, AL Advisory Council members Amir Hossain Amu and Suranjit Sengupta, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury, Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid, AL Organising Secretary Misbahuddin Siraj and Chief Whip Abdus Shahid also spoke at the rally.

SURANJIT RESIGNS

Minister without portfolio Suranjit Sengupta tendered his resignation to the prime minister during her visit to Moulvibazar, reports our staff correspondent.

Suranjit confirmed it to The Daily Star over the phone.

AB Tajul Islam was the first to step down as state minister for liberation war affairs on Wednesday to pave the way for the formation of an all-party polls-time government.

On Thursday, more than 20 ministers handed their resignation letters to the prime minister.

The remaining members of the current cabinet would tender their resignation by Monday, said sources.

Solution-brokers in depths of despair

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commissioner in Dhaka.

The comment came at a time when the UN is "hesitant" about sending any mission to facilitate any dialogue.

However, the US and India are taking a lot of interest in the polls and the future course of Bangladesh, diplomatic sources said.

India wants the US to support the government's initiative to hold the next election under an "all-party polls-time government." But the US maintains that if the BNP does not take part in the election, its outcome would not be sustainable. These differences remain unresolved, the sources added.

A number of foreign diplomats based in Dhaka told The Daily Star that they had been asking for the last one year the ruling and the opposition parties for an early settlement of their differences over the election-time government.

But neither side took any serious move to hold dialogues to help create an environment free of political unrest and violence and hold an acceptable election.

The UN also feels the same way. Terming the situation dreadful and tense, a UN official yesterday told this newspaper that there was no plan of sending any UN delegation to Dhaka immediately.

"The UN secretary general himself called both the leaders and issued statements. Earlier, he also sent his deputy, Oscar Fernandez-Taranco, twice but nobody listened. It is very difficult to say if any mission would come to Bangladesh to facilitate a dialogue for free, fair and acceptable election," the official added, preferring not to be named.

A diplomat of a European country said the UN, the European Union, the US, China and other diplomatic missions in Dhaka tried their best in recent months to engage the ruling and

the opposition parties in a constructive dialogue to resolve the crisis.

But all efforts seem futile now as none of the parties listened to the call. Instead, both the sides are becoming more and more confrontational, said the diplomat, on condition of anonymity.

Diplomats of European countries are also disappointed with the BNP for calling a 72-hour hartal immediately after eight European envoys met Khaleda Zia and urged her to refrain from calling further shutdowns. (The opposition yesterday extended its hartal to 84 hours, protesting the arrests of its five top leaders.)

European diplomats, who also called on the BNP not to boycott the election, hoped the party would consider the call and take a positive step. "But they became very disappointed when they came to know about the hartal call hours after their meeting," said another diplomatic source.

The EU delegation also met Hasina and called for an immediate dialogue for a political solution, aimed at holding a free, fair and credible election.

INDIA-US ON BANGLADESH

Sources said the AL government had turned to India to handle the US, as its relations with the US soured recently over Grameen Bank and Tcf, among other issues.

During his official visit to the US in September, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh raised the issue of Bangladesh's election in talks with US President Barack Obama. Sources say Manmohan told Obama that the AL government had greatly addressed the security concerns of India and cooperated with both India and the US in counterterrorism initiatives. India hoped that the US would be with India on the issue of Bangladesh.

In late September, American ambassador to Bangladesh Dan Mozena visited India and

reportedly discussed Bangladesh election with Indian officials.

A report by Indian government news agency Thursday said India and the US had discussed the election issue, after the US president asked his officials to "ramp up talks with India" on Bangladesh.

An official of the Indian high commission, on condition of anonymity, told The Daily Star that the PTI news was absolutely correct and that Obama had instructed his officials to adjust its policy towards Bangladesh.

US embassy officials in Dhaka declined to comment on the news but they underscored the urgency of finding a way forward to a free, fair and credible election in Bangladesh.

"We call on all parties to eschew violence. Violence of any nature is not part of the democratic process and is not acceptable. There must be political space so all parties can express their views freely and peacefully. This is an essential element of democracy," said US embassy spokesperson Kelly McCarthy, when asked about the ongoing situation.

"Now more than ever as elections quickly approach, the major parties must engage in constructive dialogue to find a way forward to free, fair and credible elections," she added.

Earlier on August 23, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon made phone calls to Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia, urging them to hold talks for a peaceful resolution to the crisis.

On September 9, US Secretary of State John Kerry sent letters to Hasina and Khaleda, making a similar call.

Then on October 31, the UN chief in a statement expressed concern about the latest wave of deadly violence and called for initiating talks to ensure an environment conducive to credible and peaceful elections.

Cops crowd

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deployment of additional law enforcers around the opposition leader's house since early Friday, a police official told The Daily Star that this was "for her security."

As of filing this report at 1:00am today, the BNP chairperson did not go out of her house. She usually goes to her Gulshan office in the evening.

None of the top and mid-level leaders were seen at Khaleda's Gulshan office or the party headquarters at Nayapalton. Their mobile phones were also found switched off.

Talking to The Daily Star, some leaders said they were advised not to visit Khaleda's residence or office for now. Avoiding arrest is part of the party's strategy as the anti-government movement was nearing its peak, they added.

Early Saturday, police arrested the BNP chairperson's adviser Abdul Awal Mintoo and her special assistant Shimul Biswas while the two were coming out of her residence. This followed the arrest of standing committee members Moudud Ahmed, MK Anwar and Rafiqul Islam Miah on Friday night.

Throughout the day, speculations were rife that Khaleda might be under house arrest and she might be arrested soon.

Amid this all, an eight-member delegation of university teachers led by Prof. AFM Yusuf Haider, former pro-VC of Dhaka University, met Khaleda Zia at her residence around 9:00pm.

Besides, pro-BNP professionals including lawyers, engineers, doctors and journalists also visited her around 11:30pm.

Emerging from the meeting, Yusuf Haider told reporters, "We came here to exchange pleasantries and inquire about her [Khaleda] health. We have also talked about

the country's political situation and expressed concern over the prevailing situation."

Earlier, Kaniz Fatima, wife of Khaleda's younger brother Shamim Iskander, and Ruhul Alam Chowdhury, an adviser to the BNP chief, went there to visit her. Fatima and Ruhul Alam Chowdhury stayed for about an hour.

Meanwhile, police on Friday and Saturday night raided the houses of a number of BNP standing committee members including Mirza Abbas and Goyeshwar Chandra Roy.

Besides, they raided the houses of Chief Whip of the Opposition Zainul Abidin Faroque, Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmed and lawmaker Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anne, among others.

Argentina's Kirchner cleared by doctors post-surgery

AFP, Buenos Aires

One month after surgery to remove a blood clot on her brain, President Cristina Kirchner has been cleared to resume work, officials in Argentina said on yesterday.

Kirchner was cleared by the Fundacion Favalaro Hospital after passing a battery of "neurological and neurosurgical tests" administered late Friday, said government spokesman Alfredo Scoccimarro.

She is expected resume her official duties on Monday.

Doctors said Kirchner is prohibited from flying for the next month and will have to undergo follow-up cardiac testing to determine how heavy a workload she should take on as she resumes her official duties.