

RIVERS TURAG, BALU

# Grabbers feast on faulty demarcation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

The demarcation of the rivers Turag and Balu is grossly flawed, and if the authorities do not take prompt measures to rectify it, both the rivers will disappear, the task force for saving the four rivers around the capital was told yesterday at its 23rd meeting.

"Demarcation of the Buriganga and Shitalakhya has not raised serious questions but the way the Turag and Balu have been demarcated, they will cease to exist in the near future," said Chairman of Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority Samsuddoha Khondaker, who is also a member of the task force.

Echoing his views, MA Matin, general secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), said they have conducted a survey along the Turag and Balu, and found that 98 percent of the demarcation pillars have been installed in the rivers. "With such demarcation, we are paving the way for grabbers to take over the rivers," he added.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan, also head of the task force, who chaired

the meeting, proposed formation of yet another high-powered committee to investigate the matter.

An eight-member committee was then formed, comprising top bureaucrats and representatives from Bapa and Poribesh Bachao Andolon (Poba). The committee was given 30 working days to report back on the two rivers.

Previously two committees had been formed by the Gazipur district administration but that did not bring any results.

Officials present at yesterday's meeting criticised Dhaka Wasa for not taking any steps to stop discharging liquid waste into the rivers. When a top Wasa official said they were trying to procure funds for a sewerage master plan, other officials came down heavily on him.

"We have been hearing about the master plan for the last 10 years. Wasa is making people pay for sewerage service but it is not doing anything to stop polluting our rivers," said one official.



With flour selling at Tk 32-35 a kg in kitchen markets, people crowd a TCB outlet in Madhya Badda in Dhaka yesterday where flour was being sold for Tk 22.

## Rule of law vs use of law to intimidate

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doing is destroying the whole notion of rule of law by flouting it, bending it, distorting and downright abusing it. It is taking the desire of the people to see strong action taken against the violence unleashed by the recent hartals and using it against the criminals among the BNP rank and file, but instead using it against top leaders who cannot even remotely have been associated with it.

By so doing the Awami League government is setting a dangerous precedent of how to use the legal system to harass, weaken and selectively imprison opposition leaders before a national election and thereby cripple the opposition. The ruling party is behaving as if there is no tomorrow, and that political power will never change and a day will not come when it will have to sit on the opposition benches.

Yesterday, three senior leaders of the BNP, namely, Moudud Ahmed, M.K. Anwar, Rafiqul Islam Mia, and two others, Shamsur Rahman (Shimul Bishwas) and Abdul Awal Minto, were sent on an eight-day remand for questioning in the following two cases:

1. On 24th September, 2013, according to the case statement, 54 BNP leaders and activists named in the FIR along with 80/90

other unnamed persons, under the planning and instruction of the detained five BNP leaders, brought out a sudden procession in front of Ideal School and College and stopped the flow of traffic to create panic amongst the public. They also vandalised cars and attacked their drivers in order to kill them. The procession also attacked the police and prevented them from carrying out their duties.

In addition, the accused five detainees on various TV talk shows and in public meetings termed this government as "illegal" and thereby instigated government officials to desist from obeying the law.

2. On 5th November, 2013 the same accused five BNP leaders are supposed to have done the same things with similar results, only the location being different.

Earlier, in April 2012, the acting Secretary General of BNP, Mirza Fakhrul, among the better educated politicians in the country, was sent to jail, along with many other top leaders, for torching a vehicle in front of the PMO. In this case M.K. Anwar, Brig. Gen. (retd) Shah Hannan and former energy minister Khandakar Musharraf were also sued.

In May 2012, Fakhrul and others were also charged with throwing a handmade bomb inside the secretariat. In this case

BNP alliance party leaders Oli Ahmed, a former minister, and Andaleev Rahman Partho, MP and a barrister, were also sued.

Can it be credible that these leaders who have spent years in politics and had been years in power as ministers, with some being elected members of parliament, can become common thugs and criminals?

The reason for the appeal for remand in the two cases filed most recently is that they need to be questioned to dig further as to their future plans to cause disruption and violence.

According to the police FIR (First information Report) Moudud has been recorded to be 73 years old and M.K. Anwar 81 and Rafiqul Islam 71. Is it credible that these people, given their age, can actually be involved with the type of violence that we have been recently seeing in the streets? There is no record of these people being involved with terror and violence politics in their own parties. In fact they are known for being voices of moderation in intra-party debates.

In both parties there are two very distinct groups. Just as in AL there are those who take a hardline on the opposition, there are others who preach understanding. The same is

true of the opposition as well. The BNP leaders under discussion are known for their moderate positions. So arresting them and not the ones who are actually masterminding the violence can only lead to a weakening of the moderates within BNP and a strengthening of the hands of the violence seekers.

We all know what it means to take one on remand. It is where all means (read illegal and violent) are used to extract information. These methods include torture, or methods verging on torture, which is never admitted by the police or the government. In the best case scenario these aged and veteran politicians will be subjected to long stretches of sleep deprivation, high voltage light, high decibel noise, uncomfortable bed, restricted access to toilet and windowless rooms. Taking political leaders on remand was unimaginable till most recently. But gone are the days when politicians were treated with dignity in prison.

We can anticipate ruling party mockery about how our heart is bleeding for opposition politicians and not for the victims of the violence. They may even taunt us by saying where was our bleeding heart when AL leaders were mistreated by BNP, totally forgetting our vigorous protest on all such occasions.

The reason for our protest today is the selective, partisan and distorted use of the law in trying to suppress the opposition in the name of suppressing violence. If, instead of these leading figures of the opposition, the real criminals of BNP- and there are many- had been arrested we would not only have heaved a sigh of relief but cheered the government all the way.

Tragically, that is not the case. It is a case of electioneering by misusing the legal system, the police and other law enforcement agencies. It is a case of electioneering by distorting the various arms of the executive branch of the state - a distortion that will take years to mend, if it ever can be, and for which we will have to pay a very high price in the future.

While we condemn the opposition for its gruesome and wanton violence in recent politics and their refusal to renounce it, we also condemn the government for using the incidents of violence not to arrest the real culprits but the party veterans in an attempt to cripple the opposition before the election.

When the law becomes an instrument of partisan politics rather than a source of justice, we really need to think where we are headed.

## Brow-raising order

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alliance leaders at BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office. It will be made public after the alliance's secretary-level meeting the following day," said the leader wishing anonymity.

The remanded leaders are BNP standing committee members Moudud Ahmed, 73, MK Anwar, 81, and Rafiqul Islam Miah, 71, and BNP chief Khaleda Zia's adviser Abdul Awal Minto, 65, and her special assistant Shimul Biswas, 56.

Of them, Moudud and Anwar are members of the current parliament and were influential ministers of the last BNP-led government, while Minto is a top businessman and a former president of the apex trade body FBCCI.

The cases against the BNP leaders were filed in September and November on charges of "attempted murder of cops" and "creating violence" in the capital during the party's programmes.

After their detention a week ago, the leaders were shown arrested in both the cases and produced before a magistrate's court on Saturday with 10 days' remand prayer in each case.

The court did not dispose of the remand petitions that day and sent the detainees to jail.

Metropolitan Magistrate of Dhaka Rezaul Karim yesterday granted the remand prayer, rejecting the bail petitions.

During the hearing, public prosecutors argued that the opposition leaders had been provoking violence and killing innocent people to oust the government.

Counsels for the BNP leaders, however, said

the arrests had been made to harass their clients politically and that they all were senior citizens and in no way they could be involved in vandalism and instigating killings.

Meanwhile, additional police force had to be deployed on the court premises as pro-opposition lawyers brought out a procession protesting the remand order. They also blasted the magistrate for the decision.

The BNP leaders' arrests are seen by many as the government strategy to thwart the anti-government movement.

Law enforcers detained them hours after the BNP-led combine announced on Friday afternoon a 72-hour nationwide hartal from the following Sunday.

This, however, could not rein in the opposition; rather, the hartal was extended by 12 more hours protesting the arrests.

The main opposition BNP yesterday strongly denounced the remand order and demanded immediate release of its leaders.

"The government used the court to place our leaders on remand," alleged BNP Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi at an emergency press briefing.

This was a demonstration of the government's "vindictive and dirty game", he added. This is not the first time the government had detained senior opposition leaders in cases filed for violence during street agitation.

Since 2012, dozens of BNP senior leaders have been detained and put behind bars for months. They all later came out on bail.

Like the previous cases against the opposition leaders, the latest two are also interesting in nature.

According to the remand prayer in the case filed on November 6, opposition activists as per plans of the detained BNP leaders blocked a road at Kamalapur Bazar and hurled several crude bombs at law enforcers on the hartal day on November 5.

As per the case filed on September 24, BNP activists that day brought out a procession protesting submission of a charge-sheet against four leaders of pro-BNP student body Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal in connection with a case for hurling crude bombs at the house of the information minister.

The case statement also added that under the instructions of the detained BNP leaders, the partymen had brought out procession and vandalised and torched a car, and blasted several crude bombs in front of Motijheel Ideal School and College.

### 2 MORE PRO-BNP LEADERS HELD

Detectives yesterday detained two senior leaders of BNP's voluntary wing Jatiyatabadi Swachhasebak Dal in the capital.

However, the reason behind the arrests of JSD secretary general Sharafat Ali Sapu and its organising secretary Shariful Bari Babu was not made public immediately.

Abu Yusuf, an assistant commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, confirmed the arrests.

Law enforcers picked up Sapu, also a cousin of Zubaeda Khan Rahman, wife of BNP Senior Vice-Chairman Tarique Rahman, and Babu from Bangla Motor area around 7:00pm.

Sources said the two were on their way to the Jatiya Press Club to attend a programme of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia.

## Ershad forming

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Ershad, BDB president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, KSJL chief Kader Siddique and JSD chief ASM Abdur Rob held a three-hour-long meeting at the BDB chief's Baridhara residence on Wednesday night.

At the meeting yesterday, Ershad said Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain and some other Islamic parties would also join him to "rid the country of the two major alliances".

He added, "One alliance wants a caretaker government while the other wants an all-party government to hold the next general election. But no one talks about the common people because their only aim is to go to power."

"Now we have an opportunity and we have to take it for the betterment of the

country and its people."

Blasting the AL- and BNP-led alliances, Ershad said none of them knows how many parties they have on their side. "But this time we will form an alliance and this will form the next government."

Many people are dying in hartals in recent days, he mentioned, but neither AL President Sheikh Hasina nor BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had gone to visit the families of the dead.

About the state of democracy in Bangladesh, he said, "Autocratic rule, instead of democracy, is the order of the day. And those who used to call me a dictator have now become autocratic leaders."

The JP boss reiterated that his party will not participate in the election if it is not contested by all the parties.

## Holy Ashura today

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Muhammad (Pbuh), along with his family members and followers embraced martyrdom in Karbala to uphold the spirit of the Prophet (SM).

Different religious organisations and political groups have undertaken various programmes to observe the day.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia had issued separate messages on the occasion.

In his message, the president said, "On

this day, I wish unity, solidarity and continuous development of the Muslim Ummah along with establishment of a society-based on justice and equality."

The prime minister, in her message, urged all to take lessons from the holy Ashura to establish truth and justice in life.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television, private TV channels and radio stations will air special programmes, and national dailies will publish articles highlighting the significance of the day.

## Ministers stay put

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ministers' resignations has sparked the controversy, as the constitution leaves no room for the premier to do anything about a minister's resignation once it is submitted, say some legal experts.

The office of a minister other than the PM shall be vacant if he resigns from office by handing over resignation letter to the PM for submission to the president, according to article 58(1) (a) of the constitution.

They keep doing their ministerial jobs, like participating in the cabinet meeting, amid widespread controversy over their authority to do so and their current status after tendering resignation.

Addressing the programme at the DU senate building, Hasina said there will be a small cabinet when the general election

comes closer to the due date.

"We could have dissolved the cabinet. But without doing so, when I asked them [ministers], they submitted their resignation letters," the PM said.

She claimed that as per the constitution, the prime minister has the right to reshuffle the cabinet by excluding someone or inducting some new faces.

"So, as a prime minister I will decide whom I will keep and whom I will drop from the cabinet, and will then send recommendations to the president for his approval," the premier said.

Mentioning the resignation of former state minister for home Tanjim Ahmad Sohel Taj, she said, "He [Sohel] resigned from his post, but I did not accept it then. He continued holding his post until I accepted the resigna-

tion."

The premier said that nothing has happened outside the constitution. She alleged that a section of people are spreading confusion without being fully aware of the matter.

Hasina also criticised the participants of television talk shows for their comments in this regard.

"We want the continuation of democracy and, at the same time, we do not want to leave any space through which anyone can take over the state power unconstitutionally," she told her audience.

The premier also said, "We want to establish a good system for the future generation under which the elections will be held."

No fair elections had been held in Bangladesh after the killing of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur

Rahman on August 15, 1975, she said.

"Why there will be an electoral system on ad hoc basis again and again?" she said in an oblique reference to the BNP's demand for restoration of a non-party caretaker government.

The next election will be held following the current constitutional guidelines, she added.

Hasina thanked the DU teachers and students for taking to the streets to protest against the past military-backed caretaker government.

"As you had built the movement, we got democracy and elections back," she said mentioning that the DU played a key role in every democratic movement since 1948.

Before attending the function, the premier inaugurated six new buildings, including one dormitory for students, at the DU campus.

University Grants Commission Chairman Prof AK Azad Chowdhury, DU Vice Chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, among others, spoke.

### PM ARRIVES IN COLOMBO

Hasina arrived in Colombo yesterday afternoon on a two-day official visit to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, 2013, reports UNB.

Sri Lankan Power and Energy Minister Poravithra Devi Wannia Rachchi and Bangladesh High Commissioner to Sri Lanka Md Sufiur Rahman received Hasina at the airport.

Earlier, a special flight of Biman carrying the premier and her 47-member entourage took off from Shahjalal International Airport at about 2:10 pm.