

18-PARTY AGITATION AL plans counter programmes

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The ruling Awami League is going to take to the streets to encourage people to vote and counter the opposition alliance's movement to "foil" the elections.

The ruling party programme will continue until the forthcoming poll slated for January 5, 2014.

The instructions came from AL President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at a cabinet meeting yesterday.

According to meeting sources, she directed ministers to unite the party men and pro-liberation forces in their areas and face the opposition agitation with the party as a whole.

AL high-ups had already forwarded the instructions to all district-level leaders and polls candidates to organise rallies and meetings every day in their districts and constituencies, sources said.

The candidates have also been asked to celebrate the Victory Day in grandeur while the district leaders have been warned of organisational

actions if they failed to comply with the directive.

The party also asked its grassroots leaders to beware of possible attacks by BNP-Jamaat cadres and assist law enforcement agencies in resisting violence by the opposition activists.

As part of the move, top party leaders would visit violence-prone districts within a couple of days to encourage party activists there, said sources, adding that the leaders would visit 15 to 17 districts including Satkhira, Joypurhat, Rajshahi, Bagerhat, Khulna, Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Comilla, Chapainawabganj, Bogra and Jessor.

Talking to The Daily Star, AL Joint General Secretary Jahangir Kabir Nanak said, "We will visit the violence-hit areas to create awareness against militancy, fundamentalism, terrorism and conspiracy."

Khulna city AL General Secretary Mijanur Rahman Mijan, also a candidate for Khulna-2 constituency, told The Daily Star about his receiving the instructions over the phone and via text message.

WTO's Bali package

FROM PAGE 16
yesterday by the think-tank's research director Fahmida Khatun.

Bangladesh as a least-developed country (LDC) is entitled to both technical and financial support to implement the feature, and CPD said the country could do well by taking the opportunity to enhance its infrastructure and incorporate modern customs systems and behaviour.

As part of the LDC package, one of the three pillars of the historic deal, Bangladesh is allowed preferential access to richer countries' services markets. A high-level meeting is scheduled in 2014 to decide on how to go about this feature.

Khatun said it is a "good opportunity" for the country to increase its export of semi-skilled and skilled manpower, but much homework is needed to identify the sectors and countries to export.

Other than presenting the sectors and modes for potential exports, Bangladesh should press for elimination of non-tariff barriers such as the 'economic needs test', a test that conditions market access upon the fulfilment of certain economic criteria, at the meeting next year.

"Bangladesh needs financial and technical support to strengthen its domestic support capacities to take advantage of the granted preference," the report said.

About the much-touted duty-free and quota-free (DF-QF) access of LDC products to developed and developing countries, the CPD is sceptical about the efficacy of the feature.

The ninth ministerial conference outcome document states that developed country members that do not yet provide DF-QF market access for at least 97 percent of products originating from LDCs "shall seek" to improve their coverage before the next ministerial meet.

The CPD noted that there is no specific timeframe and legally-binding commitments attached to this feature. More importantly, garment, the country's main export item, is on the '3 percent exclusion list' of the US, the country's single largest export destination.

"Unless the obligation is legally binding with concrete timeframe Bangladesh will not receive any additional benefit," the report said.

Thai PM calls early polls

FROM PAGE 16
Shinawatra, a tycoon-turned-premier who was ousted by royalist generals in a coup seven years ago and lives overseas.

"The movement will keep on fighting," anti-government leader Suthep Thaugsuban, who faces an arrest warrant for insurrection, told AFP.

He struck a more triumphant tone when addressing supporters later in the day.

"We have totally eradicated the Thaksin regime from Thailand. Today is historic. Your work has paid off because we can begin the first step to reform Thailand," he told a sea of supporters.

The political conflict broadly pits a Bangkok-based middle class and royalist elite backed by the military against rural and working-class voters loyal to Thaksin.

His overthrow in 2006 by generals loyal to the king ushered in years of political turmoil and rival street protests by the royalist "Yellow Shirts" and Thaksin's supporters, known as the "Red Shirts".

Thaksin -- who once described Yingluck as his "clone" -- is widely considered the de facto leader of the ruling party.

Pro-Thaksin parties have won every election in more than a decade, while the opposition Democrat Party -- whose MPs resigned en masse Sunday because they could not achieve anything in parliament -- has not won an elected majority in about two decades.

Democrat Party officials said yesterday they had not yet decided whether to take part in the upcoming election, which must be held within 60 days of the house's dissolution.

"The anti-government protesters want to take over the government. They do not want to contest for government because they have lost each time," said Thitinan Pongsudhirak, director of the Institute of Security and International Studies at Bangkok's Chulalongkorn University.

"If they succeed we will likely have more turmoil in Thailand because the pro-government supporters, the so-called Red Shirts, have not been heard so far and we can presume that they must be very angry at the turn of events."

Dozens of people were killed in a military crackdown on mass pro-Thaksin Red Shirt rallies in Bangkok three years ago.

Yingluck's Puea Thai party said she was likely to be its candidate for prime minister again in the upcoming election, which it expects to be held on or around February 2.

"We don't want any more elections."

Around 140,000 people were estimated to have joined the protests by early afternoon, according to the government's Centre for the Administration of Peace and Order, which was set up to deal with the unrest.

Demonstrators marched along several routes through the capital to the government headquarters -- the main target of the rally.

"We don't want politics any more -- no elections. Only the protesters can choose the next government. We choose, then the king appoints them," said one demonstrator who did not want to be named.

Tensions remain high after several days of street clashes last week when police used tear gas, water cannon and rubber bullets against rock-throwing demonstrators.

The unrest has left five people dead and more than 200 injured. Authorities have said they would try to avoid fresh confrontation and there were no reports of violence by early evening.

"Police are unarmed, with only shields and batons. We will not use tear gas, or if we have no choice, its use will be limited," Interior Minister Jarupong Ruangsawan said ahead of the rally.

"The government believes we can control the situation. We will focus on negotiation," he added.

The demonstrations were triggered by an amnesty bill, since dropped by Yingluck's ruling party, which opponents feared would have cleared the way for Thaksin's return.

The former premier went into exile in 2008 to avoid jail for a corruption conviction which he says was politically motivated.

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Mostafa Hawlader, who was stabbed in Pirojpur early Sunday, is in a critical condition at the intensive care unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

His son Hafizul Islam yesterday said his father had been shifted from the neurosurgery ward and was yet to regain consciousness.

Mostafa, who testified against Jamaat Nayeb-e-Ameer Delawar Hossain Sayeedee, came under attack in his house Sunday around 2:30am. He was rushed to DMCH at night.

Tariq Mahmood Hannan, officer-in-charge of Debidwar Police Station, said they had detained two suspects in connection with the arson attack.

In an interview with a private television

channel, PM's media adviser Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury yesterday said sending resignation letters by post is "not acceptable as it is a violation of the constitution and undermines the dignity of ministerial posts."

"So they [JP ministers] will have to turn in resignations as mentioned in the constitution," he added.

POLLS CAN BE DEFERRED

Speaking at the press conference, Ershad said there is a scope for deferring the polls schedule as per the constitution.

The JP, he added, would contest the election if it is inclusive. But even if the ruling Awami League offers the JP 200 parliamentary seats, his party will not join the electoral race without the participation of all other parties, insisted the former military ruler.

Ershad also mentioned that he has instructed the party nominees to withdraw their nomination papers by December 13.

Bangladeshis in S'pore urged to remain calm

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh High Commissioner in Singapore Mahbub-uz Zaman yesterday called on the Bangladesh community to remain calm and show restraint, and cooperate law enforcement agencies following a riot in Little India district Sunday night.

The rare riot broke out after international media reported that a Bangladeshi worker had been hit and killed by a bus in the district.

In a statement, Zaman said, "I want to categorically state that as per available information, the news reports that appeared on a section of media and news involving a Bangladeshi worker is not based on facts."

MORE ON PAGE 8

RMG exporters

FROM PAGE 1

that transport costs have surged by around 30 percent due to expensive air shipment.

The BGMEA's research and development team has collected three-day data (December 1-3) from 10 exporters to assess the overall losses caused by the blockade.

Orders worth \$3.96 lakh were cancelled during the period, while the exporters spent \$3.08 lakh on air shipment.

In the form of penalty for delayed shipment, the exporters saw a price cut by around \$1.08 lakh as orders worth \$27.70 lakh were delayed.

"We collected the data to show the government and the opposition how we are incurring losses due to blockades," the BGMEA president said.

The \$20-billion export sector has already been hit by a number of recent disasters, including fire and factory building collapse, added Atiqul Islam.

Owners do not operate trucks and covered vans on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway for fear of vandalism and arson.

Fares of covered vans, said the BGMEA chief, surged to Tk45,000 - Tk50,000 last week from Tk 15,000-Tk 20,000 on normal days.

"The blockade is ruining our export prospects and growth," said Abdus Salam Murshed, president of Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

Many factories have halted production as they can't bring imported raw materials from ports, he pointed out.

Buyers are very strict about lead time due to the upcoming Christmas sales, he noted, adding that many exporters cannot afford air shipment.

Salam expressed concern that small factory owners may go bankrupt if they fail to clear shipment on time.

Cost of production increased by around fivefold in some cases during the blockade, said Prem Sani, finance director of Epic Designers Ltd, a Hong Kong-based apparel exporter. "Everyone in the sector is counting losses."

JCD leader

FROM PAGE 16

the town, was the vice-president of JCD Jessor district unit.

The BNP called a dawn-to-dusk hartal for tomorrow in the district protesting the killing. JCD activists also brought out a procession.

Member of the JCD district unit Shamsuzzaman Rintu, who sustained bullet injuries, was undergoing treatment at the Jessor Medical College Hospital.

Emdadul Haque Sheikh, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station, quoting locals said the criminals riding two motorbikes hurled a crude bomb at Polash and Rintu when they were having tea at a tea stall in the Civil Court area of the town around 7:00 pm.

When Polash fell to the ground, the criminals shot him point-blank in his head. The miscreants also shot Rintu four times in the hand and legs.

The duo was whisked off to the hospital, where the doctors declared Polash dead after half an hour.

Sabirul Haque Sabu, secretary of the BNP district unit, said this murder was a part of the ongoing anarchy across the country.

Burnt in blockade

FROM PAGE 1

As of yesterday, 30 arson victims were undergoing treatment at the burn unit.

Of them, four victims had to be admitted to the Intensive Care Unit while eight others to High Dependency Unit.

Mujibur along with his family lives at Alambagh in the capital's Purba Jurain area. When he was brought to DMCH, his mother was seen waiting at the entrance of the burn unit, in tears.

"My wretched son lost speech to typhoid in his childhood. Now he is going through unbearable pain and can't even express that," the mother lamented.

"During the Liberation War he was just a few days old. We protected him from every possible danger. But they [pickets] burnt my son in the independent country," she said when this correspondent asked her about Mujibur's age.

Mujibur is the eldest among her four sons and a daughter.

He started serving as a helper in different transport companies when he was just a teenager. For not being able to speak, Mujibur never got to become a driver, said the mother.

A father of two daughters and a son, Mujibur had to agree to take the trip to feed his family and help his mother.

Tariq Mahmood Hannan, officer-in-charge of Debidwar Police Station, said they had detained two suspects in connection with the arson attack.

Ershad and Ruhul Amin Hawlader on Sunday had claimed that the resignation letters were sent to the PMO by post.

However, Hawlader last night said the resignation letters have been submitted to the PMO.

"Now it's up to her [prime minister] whether she would accept the resignations or not."

JP ministers GM Quader, Anisul Islam Mahmud, Rawshan Ershad, Ruhul Amin Hawlader, state ministers Mujibul Haque Chunnu and Salma Islam and PM's adviser Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu did not join the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday.

In an interview with a private television

Razakars killed 42 Hindus

FROM PAGE 16

case, as Yusuf's conducting counsel again failed to show up before the court and a junior counsel expressed inability to cross-examine him.

Earlier, the tribunal also closed the cross-examinations of 12th, 13th and 14th prosecution witnesses on similar grounds. Senior defence counsels remained absent from the tribunal during blockades or hartals called by the opposition alliance.

Yusuf, nayeb-e-ameer of Jamaat, is facing 13 charges for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity and genocide committed in greater Khulna during the nine-month-long war.

Lutfar of Birkul village in Kachua said he went to Kachua Bazar to shop on April 22, 1971, he heard about a Peace Committee meeting at the collectorate office there and went inside the auditorium to see.

Yusuf, as the last speaker of the meeting, said, "Leaders, activists and supporters of Awami League, pro-liberation people and people belonging to the Hindu community are the enemy of Pakistan, annihilate them."

"The properties of the Hindus are Ganimater Maal (spoils of war); these can be used by Muslims," Lutfar quoted Yusuf as saying.

Following the speech, anti-liberation people, who had attended the meeting, attacked several nearby villages and looted valuables, he said.

At the last part of his testimony, Lutfar identified Yusuf, who was produced at the dock.

The three-member tribunal led by Justice Obaidul Hassan with members Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Shahinur Islam adjourned the case proceeding until today, when Lutfar would face cross-examination.