

Freed Pussy rockers reunite in Siberia

AFP, Krasnoyarsk

Two freed members of anti-Kremlin punk band Pussy Riot yesterday met in Siberia for the first time since their release, discussing plans to set up a new rights group to help Russian prisoners.

Maria Alyokhina, who had been serving her sentence at a prison colony in the central city of Nizhny Novgorod, flew into the Siberian city of Krasnoyarsk to meet up with bandmate Nadezhda Tolokonnikova, who was released

March to Dhaka

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headquarters after the protest march. There, she is expected to declare the next action of her party-led 18-party alliance.

On the formation of resistance committees, she asked her alliance members to involve all sections of society, including minorities, and remain alert to ensure their safety and security. "There will be zero tolerance for any form of communalism."

She also called upon her supporters to maintain law and order and protect the lives and properties of all citizens through formation of neighbourhood watch groups.

This announcement of the "March for Democracy" comes following a series of mindless blockades from November 26, a day after the Election Commission declared the polls date.

Till yesterday, the opposition enforced blockades of roads, rails and waterways for 22 days, crippling communications countrywide. Frequent clashes, arson blasts and killings took place almost every day, claiming at least 120 lives.

Only seven days were free from the blockades – four Fridays, two holidays for Martyred Intellectuals Day and Victory Day and December 15 when the Jamaat-e-Islami enforced a hartal to protest the execution of convicted war criminal Quader Mollah.

Khaleda earlier had called another march towards Dhaka for the restoration of the caretaker government system.

The government imposed heavy restrictions and police joined by ruling party activists blocked roads, rail and waterways to stop opposition supporters from pouring into Dhaka on March 12 last year.

Yesterday, she warned the government not to obstruct Sunday's march by any means.

"Do not block roads, close down transport and hotels. Do not try to arrest or harass those coming to Dhaka. Allow citizens to exercise their fundamental right of peaceful assembly."

Otherwise, she said, the opposition would announce even stronger programmes.

Khaleda alleged the government was aware that people would rise in unison and this is why the timing of the "fraudulent election" and implementation of the verdict against Quader Mollah was "cunningly coordinated and was timed in a planned way to create diversion."

On Islamabad's expression of concern over the execution of war criminal Quader Mollah, she said, "The reaction of the Pakistani legislature on this has hurt us as citizens of Bangladesh."

She added, "The Awami League government had signed the Tripartite Agreement in 1974 and forgiven the Pakistanis accused of these crimes. Assurances were also given by them to look beyond past bitterness.

"After that all issues between Pakistan and us should be resolved through diplomatic chan-

Ensure security

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The foreign minister will hold a meeting with envoys of European nations on December 30. On Monday, he briefed diplomats from Saarc and ASEAN countries.

Envoys of the USA, Canada, Australia, China, Japan, Korea, Brazil, Russia, Norway and the Vatican and the UN resident coordinator called on the foreign minister in the morning.

One of the diplomats made mention of the recent demonstrations, including the one by Gonojagoron Mancha, that paraded through the diplomatic zone, said meeting sources.

In reply, the foreign minister told them that security had been tightened recently in the diplomatic zones in Gulshan and Baridhara.

US Ambassador Dan Mozena, Canadian High Commissioner Heather Cruden, South Korean Ambassador Lee Yun-young, Australian High Commissioner Greg Wilcock and Japanese Ambassador Shiro Sadoshima spoke at the meeting, said the sources.

Voicing concerns over the security of South Korean citizens in Bangladesh, Lee Yun-young said a Korean national was kidnapped recently. Though

from a prison hospital.

Alyokhina, 25, and Tolokonnikova, 24, were released two months early under a Kremlin-backed amnesty after serving most of their two-year sentences for staging a protest performance against Putin in an Orthodox cathedral in Moscow in February 2012.

Tolokonnikova's husband Pyotr Verzilov told AFP the two women had discussed plans to create "a fully-fledged organisation to help inmates."

nels. Any attempt to do otherwise is an expression of the diplomatic failure of this government.

"It's an issue with another country. It should be settled through diplomatic channels. But we notice that dirty politics is going on inside the country centring on a diplomatic issue."

On the January 5 polls, she said MPs who will be elected in the election will not be considered as legitimate representatives of the people as they do not enjoy any popular mandate.

The ruling Awami League and 11 other parties, most of which are components of the AL-led alliance, are contesting the polls. Amid a boycott by the BNP-led 18-party alliance, as many as 154 candidates are set to be elected uncontested.

The Election Commission decided to deploy the army for 15 days from tomorrow to work alongside other law enforcement agencies to ensure security for polling in the remaining 146 constituencies on January 5.

"Now plans are on to involve members of the country's armed forces in these illegal activities, said Khaleda. "The masterminds of the BDR carnage and the planners of the Shapla Square massacre are now plotting to put the country's patriotic armed forces against the people."

She appealed to all those who are concerned not to involve the army in the "fraudulent election" and make it controversial.

Khaleda added the government which would be formed through the election would also not have any legitimacy.

"Such a government will be undemocratic and unrepresentative. No servant of the Republic is obliged to follow the orders of such an illegitimate government," she said.

"I appeal to all citizens and the voters of Bangladesh to boycott this farcical exercise. When the whole world has decided not to grant any legitimacy to it, when the majority of the people are not involved with this, I ask all those connected with the process to stay away from it also."

Referring to three-round dialogue between the government and the opposition through the initiative of the UN, Khaleda said it was now clear that the government had staged a drama in the name of dialogue to kill time to carry out its plans of holding the farcical polls.

"Despite knowing that no election is possible without the participation of the two main parties, the AL pressed ahead with its design to hold a one-sided election," she said.

Terming the incumbent government "illegal", she said the servants of the republic and citizens will not be bound to comply with its order.

Alleging that the government had turned what she said "invalid" much earlier, the former premier said her party did not bring down the government because it did not want to see a constitutional void in the country.

freed later, the abductee was beaten up badly. Another Korean citizen also fell prey to mugging.

The Canadian high commissioner wanted to know about the recent remarks by top ruling party leaders, who talked about the 11th parliamentary polls even before the holding of the 10th general election.

The foreign minister refrained from giving any reply.

Most of the diplomats didn't show any interest in the January 5 national election, meeting sources said.

In the afternoon, ambassadors and heads of missions from member-states of the OIC met the foreign minister at the state guesthouse.

Apart from expressing security concerns, they called for calm and restraint to sustain peace and stability in Bangladesh.

The foreign minister told them that the government was determined to thwart any threat to public security and the stability of the state, said a press release of the foreign ministry yesterday.

The heads of the missions expressed satisfaction at the additional security measures in the

ments in Milk Vita.

Contacted, Hasib Khan Tarun, chairman of the management committee, said they had removed Munir as he had "not been discharging his duties."

Enquired whether the committee had the jurisdiction for making such a decision, Tarun said the government would consider whether the management had the jurisdiction or not.

Since joining the firm, Munir wanted to identify and punish corrupt employees, but has been implicated on a rather flimsy allegation of "being a Hefajat-e Islam supporter and misbehaving with a board member."

Joint Secretary Mohibul said Munir is a very honest and efficient officer and he has turned Milk Vita into a profitable organisation.

The dairy has been plagued with corruption and anomalies for long. As Munir attempted to prevent such practices, corrupt syndicates were up in arms against him, mentioned Mohibul.

Youth killed

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The joint forces, consisting of members of the police and Border Guard Bangladesh, had gone there to remove the barricades from the Satkhira-Jessore highway in Jhaudanga Bazar area.

As the law enforcers started removing the barricades around 8:45am, activists of Jamaat-e-Islami and Islami Chhatra Shibir attacked them with brick chips, said police and witnesses.

The Jamaat-Shibir men had put up the barricades around two hours before. Officer-in-Charge Inamul Haque of Satkhira Sadar Police Station said they also threw brick chips at some of the buses there.

Hafizul was standing at the roadside at that time. Haran was in his mechanical shop nearby when he was hit in the head.

Hafizul's family members and a few Jamaat-Shibir men took his body and hid it in Rudrapur Beel, witnesses said. Police recovered the body from there around 2:45pm and sent it to the Satkhira Sadar Hospital morgue.

Hafizul's brother Shahidul Islam said locals had told them that if the police took the body, they would not return it. That is why they hid the body.

He added that none of his four brothers was involved with any political party.

With Hafizul, at least three people have been killed in the drives in Satkhira that began on December 15. However, the joint forces claimed that five people were killed in a drive on December 15 alone, while Jamaat claimed one.

Meanwhile, the joint forces arrested eight Jamaat-Shibir men between Monday night and yesterday evening. They have so far arrested 58 people in their drives.

The drives were launched in the wake of large-scale violence in the southern district during the hartals and blockades in the last one month.

At least 10 leaders and activists of the ruling party were killed in the district during the period.

It's militant act

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the opposition never responded to that.

Hasina also said the High Court in its verdict had scrapped the caretaker government system and as a result there was no scope to revert back to that system.

Terming Bangladesh a place of communal harmony, the AL chief said the government has established the country as a peaceful place for the followers of all religions.

State Minister for Social Welfare Ministry Promod Mankin, Arch Bishop Patric D Rozario and Bangladesh Christian Association secretary general Nirmol Rozario also spoke on the occasion.

EC says no to AL

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directive to do so."

The Supreme Court in a landmark verdict in 2007 asked the EC to collect wealth statements of candidates and make those public so that voters could know about the candidates in their constituencies.

The EC later incorporated a provision in the Representation of the People Order (RPO), the legal framework for conducting parliamentary polls, to ensure implementation the apex court's order.

In its statement yesterday, the EC said the information about contestants is being made public from the office of returning officers locally and through the EC's official website centrally. "This practice has been continuing since the ninth national election in 2008."

"Everyone can see the information about candidates on the website," said the statement, adding that the commission has not stepped back from its practice.

The EC also urged all not to publish any "confusing" reports on this matter.

Meanwhile, the EC website yesterday developed "technical trouble" that lasted several hours. It gave rise to allegations that the commission was trying to hide the information about candidates.

But EC's System Manager Rafiqul Islam said the webpage faced technical problem because many people browsed the site at a time. There was no other reason behind this.

Contacted, an AL leader said the party high-ups have denounced that the CEC informed the media what the party had asked for.

Besides, Bortee, a non-government organisation that also observes polls, yesterday informed the CEC that it would deploy observers in the election, Sharmin Murshid, chief executive of the organisation told reporters.

Code breaker

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convicted of "gross indecency" with a man in 1952.

Now, nearly 60 years after his suicide from cyanide poisoning at the age of 41, Alan Turing has been officially pardoned by the Queen under the little-known Royal Prerogative of Mercy.

The pardon comes after a change of heart by ministers who had previously insisted that Turing was properly convicted of what at the time was a criminal offence.

A pardon is usually granted only when the person is innocent of the offence and where a request has been made by someone with a vested interest, such as a family member. But Turing's pardon has been issued without either requirement being met.

It follows a sustained campaign by scientists, including Stephen Hawking, and a petition to Government signed by more 37,000.

Announcing the change of heart, the Justice Secretary Chris Grayling said Turing deserved to be "remembered and recognised for his fantastic contribution to the war effort" and not for his later criminal conviction.

"His later life was overshadowed by his conviction for homosexual activity, a sentence we would now consider unjust and discriminatory and which has now been repealed," he said. "A pardon from the Queen is a fitting tribute to an exceptional man."

The pardon under the Royal Prerogative of Mercy came into effect on Monday.

Since 1945, only three high-profile pardons have been granted in England and Wales under the Royal Prerogative: to Timothy Evans, Derek Bentley and Michael Shields.



A truck carrying cows caught fire as pickets hurled a petrol bomb in Faujdardhat area of Chittagong early yesterday. The burning vehicle rammed a furniture market, which too caught fire. Seven cows, helpless and trapped, perished in the fire.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS



Cop killed in arson attack

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yesterday and were about to leave the place. As soon as they got on the bus, there was a huge bang and the vehicle was ablaze.

He managed to get down as he was near the door but Ferdous could not since he was inside and was burned alive, Faizul added.

The driver jumped out through the window. Inspector General of Police Hassan Mahmood Khandker and Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Benazir Ahmed visited the victims at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

The police chief said the policeman lost his life while he was serving the country and the people.

He said criminals were targeting his force as part of their attack on the state machinery.

Meanwhile two truckers were badly burned after blockaders set fire to a cattle-carrying truck at Sitakunda in Chittagong yesterday.

Also, seven cows were burnt alive and 15 shops were gutted as the truck ploughed through a roadside furniture market after losing control.

Saiful Islam, the helper of the truck, suffered 41 percent burns while Abu Mia, the driver, 10 percent burns. They were brought to Dhaka Medical College Hospital burn unit where doctors said Saiful's condition was critical.

Sporadic violence also took place at other places during the fifth spell of the countrywide blockade that saw vehicles vandalised and torched and dozens of people injured in running battles between activists of the opposition, Awami League and police.

In Kurigram's Roumari, at least 15 people were wounded in a clash between blockaders and AL men.

Police and witnesses said the ruling party men were going to Datbhanga on motorbikes for electioneering. As they reached Bahari intersection, blockaders swooped on them.

Blockaders also assaulted ruling Awami League lawmaker Zakir Hossain, when he arrived at the scene on hearing the news.

"I thought the situation would calm down if I went there. But they even attacked me and injured me," said Zakir Hossain.

Police picked up Abdur Razzak, organising secretary of Roumari upazila BNP, from the spot.

Protesting the arrest, the blockaders vandalised four motorbikes and a truck.

Later, activists of the AL and its associate bodies brought out a procession protesting the assault on Zakir Hossain. At one stage, the AL men attacked the house of Swechhasebak Dal leader Abul Hashem, prompting a clash that injured the 15.

In the capital, miscreants exploded two crude bombs at the entrance to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court around 10:45am, leaving two people injured.

One of the injured is Harunur Rashid, a college teacher, said Shah Alam, officer-in-charge of Kotwali Police Station. The other victim could not be immediately identified.

Miscreants also blasted three crude bombs before the Dhaka deputy commissioner's office

around 12:30pm, but no one was hurt in the incident. Police picked up one person on suspicion from the area, said the OC.

The arson attack in Chittagong happened at Fauzdarhat Bazar on the Dhaka-Chittagong highway around 5:30am.

Quoting witnesses, Md Jasimuddin, deputy assistant director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, said about 10 blockaders set alight the Chittagong-bound truck by pouring petrol.

The truck carrying 26 cattle lost control and then ploughed through the furniture market, he said.

Five furniture shops, five showrooms and five storehouses were also burnt to ashes in the incident, said Jasimuddin.

Six firefighting units from Kumira, Bandar and Agrabad fire stations rushed to the spot and doused the flames around 10:00am, said Omar Faruk of Kumira Police Station.

In Natore, blockaders vandalised 10 goods-laden trucks on the Dhaka-Natore highway in Sadar upazila despite police protection.

The opposition men made the attack when about 20-25 Rajshahi-bound trucks were crossing Harishpur bypass in Sadar upazila around 12:30am under police escort, said Tariqul Islam, assistant superintendent of police in Natore.

Law enforcers fired six rubber bullets to disperse the blockaders, who responded by throwing brick chips.

Blockaders also set fire to rail tracks at Natore Railway Station yesterday morning.

In Comilla, a clash between activists of Jamaat-Shibir and BNP and police left at least 13 people, including five policemen, wounded at Poura Bazar in Nangolkot upazila. Several opposition men suffered bullet injuries.

The one-hour clash ensued when police resisted a procession of BNP and Jamaat-Shibir men around 10:30am. Police fired at least 15 rubber bullets to disperse the activists, who hurled brick chips at them, said Swapan Kumer Nath, officer-in-charge of Nangolkot Police Station.

In Thakurgaon, BNP-Jamaat activists torched a motorbike and vandalised four trucks and a minibus from a procession in the town, said police.

They also threw brick chips and broke glass panes of two clinics opposite the Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital. Police charged batons on the unruly activists and arrested four people.

In Dinajpur, opposition activists obstructed Shibli Sadiq, an AL nominated candidate of Dinajpur-6, and tore his posters and leaflets while he was conducting a door-to-door campaign in Nawabganj upazila around 12:30pm.

Obstructed, the candidate stopped his campaign and left the place.

In Jhenidah, Jamaat-Shibir men torched two trucks at Moheshpur upazila around 10:00am.

On Monday night, miscreants vandalised an election camp of Abdul Hye, an AL candidate from Shaikupa upazila, and torched furniture there.

Law enforcers arrested 42 BNP-Jamaat men

UN seeks more Bangladeshi troops

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Momen said he had sent an urgent letter to the Armed Forces Division (AFD) on Monday upon repeated requests from the UN Peacekeeping Office to send troops for deployment on peacekeeping missions.

"The officials of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations might have pursued the UN secretary-general to directly call the Bangladeshi prime minister to make a request for the emergency need," he added.

The United Nations, he mentioned, is fully aware of the fact that it is possible only for Bangladesh to send troops for peacekeeping

missions within the shortest possible time of eight to 10 weeks.

As of 30 November 2013, Bangladesh has contributed the second highest number of military and police personnel to UN Peacekeeping Operations, totaling 7,968 members.

Bangladesh is sending some 1,450 troops to the peacekeeping mission in Mali, which is already under process, Momen told this correspondent.

Incidentally, Ban on December 11 had called Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to open a dialogue with the opposition parties to resolve

2,500 roadside trees plundered

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Members of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) removed at least 1,000 felled trees from the road stretching from Nalta in Kaliganj to Shyamnagar, Lt Col Anwarul Alam, commanding officer (CO) of BGB 34 Battalion, told The Daily Star. Besides, 38 BGB Battalion also removed around 700 felled trees.

The district parishad removed more than 100 such trees from roads, while the Roads and Highways Department cleared some 35 more.

LGED assistant engineer in Satkhira Faruq Hossain said the authorities were yet to make an estimate of how many trees had been felled on the LGED roads.

During blockades, police removed several hundred felled trees from roads, but they did not maintain any record of how many trees had been cleared, mentioned Joydeb Chowdhury, additional superintendent of Satkhira police.

Environmentalist Ashkei Elahi, principal of Atorjan Women College in Shyamnagar, said felling of so many trees would adversely affect

the environment as trees not only produce oxygen, but also provide shade and help keep the weather cool.

Shyamol Kumar Ghoshal of Agardari village said many innocent people have been implicated in numerous cases in connection with the felling of trees.

"I know my neighbour Shamsur Rahman, who was killed recently when police opened fire on a group of Jamaat-Shibir men while blocking a road. He was not involved in Jamaat politics. He went against the Awami League after he was implicated in a case for felling trees," he added.

He urged the authorities to investigate the cases immediately and relieve innocent people of the cases.

The BNP-led 18-party opposition alliance has been pressing for a non-party election-time government to oversee the next general election.

(Our Satkhira correspondent contributed to this report)