

Govt lost moral right to rule

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democracy and ensure democratic norms in Bangladesh.

She warned that due to the present government's autocratic rule the army might rise again like it had done before during Awami League tenure.

Also the chief of BNP-led 18-party opposition alliance, Khaleda once again urged public servants, law enforcement agencies and others concerned to refrain from illegal activities, killing and oppression.

She thanked the country's democracy-loving people for "boycotting" the polls.

Terming the January 5 election a mockery, she said it had been proved that a free, fair and inclusive election was impossible in Bangladesh without a non-party government and an "acceptable" election commission.

"I want to say that the ongoing crisis will not be resolved by keeping me confined to my house and oppressing the opposition men," she said, warning that the attempt to prolong the tenure of this "illegal" administration through criminal means would not save the government at the end of the day; rather it would take the crisis beyond solution.

INTERVIEW WITH BBC

The BNP chairperson yesterday said her party would not sever ties with Jamaat-e-Islami on the prime minister's request.

"As an independent political party we will go by our decisions, not hers [PM Sheikh Hasina's], said Khaleda while talking to BBC Bangla Service last night.

The ruling Awami League has been asking BNP to cut relation with Jamaat for its anti-liberation role in 1971 and the recent violence.

Khaleda said, "She [Hasina] cannot dictate us what to do and with whom. She was [once] with Jamaat and went to power."

Asked whether she wants to make any promise on the issue, she said, "Promise ... for what and to whom?"

On the opposition's next course of action and Hasina's yesterday's call to sit in a dialogue, Khaleda said the January 5 poll was nothing but a selection. No major parties except for the AL had participated in it. There was also a question regarding the participation of Jatiya Party.

Asked whether BNP wants to hold dialogues, she said the present government had its

tenure until January 24. Dialogue must be held whether it should be with the present government or the new one, as solution would not be found without talks.

Asked about Tarique's latest comment that the opposition was to continue its movement and there would be no dialogue with the present government as it has become illegal [following January 5 election], the BNP chief said, "We believe in dialogue and it is the government who will have to create the atmosphere for it. But our movement will continue."

She however said most of her party senior leaders were in jail while some were absconding to evade arrest. "No one is able to communicate them. I cannot communicate with anyone, as the government has confined me to my house. How can the dialogue be held?"

Asked what will be the demands of the opposition in the talks, Khaleda said the government would have to free our leaders and activists, and withdraw all false cases against them.

"Besides, the police have cut access to our two offices. The government will have to open those. I also cannot go outside. With whom will I be holding the dialogue if I cannot go outside?" said Khaleda.

On the opposition's earlier announcement of resisting the January 5 polls, Khaleda said it was the people who resisted the election and did not go to the vote centres.

When her attention was drawn on the primer's comment that Awami League had got mandate through the election, Khaleda asked what kind of mandate it was.

She said the government had held a one-sided election without any talks with the opposition. "They [AL] do not believe in democracy. But we want to resolve the crisis through dialogue."

In reply to prime minister's allegation that opposition was involved in violence, she said it were the government men who were involved in such activities. They had attacked the High Court.

Asked whether opposition's movement would continue, Khaleda said it depended on the government.

LAWYERS MEET KHALEDA

Khaleda last night instructed a pro-BNP lawyer's delegation to figure out whether legal measures could be taken against the govern-

ment for holding of the January 5 "farical and voter-less election", said AJ Mohammad Ali, president of Supreme Court Bar Association who led the delegation, told reporters emerging from the meeting at Khaleda's residence.

GERMAN ENVOY CALLS ON KHALEDA

German Ambassador to Bangladesh Albrecht Conze called on the BNP chief at her Gulshan residence last night. They discussed various range of issues including mutual interest of the two countries.

Khaleda told him that while in power her government had contained militancy, which had spawned during AL tenure, with the help of religious-minded people.

17 women elected

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women vying for 28 seats. Sheikh Hasina was the only woman to have contested from two seats -- Rangpur-6 and Gopalganj-3, and won both.

Until now, the 1996 parliamentary polls had the record low participation of women when 36 women contested.

But the recent number has plummeted beyond that as well.

Jatiya Party senior presidium member Raushan Ershad was declared victor by default in Mymensingh - 4 constituency.

Only two other female candidates of Jatiya Party, including its senior presidium member Salma Islam, were elected. Salma defeated AL big-wig former state minister Abdul Mannan Khan.

The other is Nasrin Jahan Ratna from Barisal - 6.

Aside from Hasina, the women to be elected from AL included Mossamat Mahabub Ara Begum Gini from Gaibandha -2, Ismat Ara Sadek from Jessore - 6, Begum Munnunjan Sufiyan from Khulna -3, Matia Chowdhury from Sherpur -2, Shagufta Yasmeen from Munshiganj -2, Sahara Khatun from Dhaka -18, Simin Hossain Rimi from Gazipur -4, Mamta Begum from Manikganj -2, Rebecca Momin from Netrokona -4, Meher Afroze from Gazipur -5, Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury from Faridpur - 2 and Dipu Moni from Chandpur - 3.

The only female lawmaker elected from Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal was Shirin Akhter of Feni-2.

Life, property to be saved

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She thanked the voters for exercising their franchise despite threats and obstructions by opposition men.

The PM called upon BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to shun violence, sever ties with the Jamaat and war criminals, and sit for talks.

She said a consensus could be reached through dialogue over the next election and all quarters must show patience and stop political violence for that to happen.

It may be mentioned that the 10th parliamentary election, boycotted by the main opposition BNP, was the bloodiest election in the country's history with the deaths of at least 18 people.

The AL won more than three-fourths of the parliamentary seats in the election that saw a low voter turnout. A total of 153 candidates, including 127 from the AL, had earlier been elected uncontested weeks before the polls.

The prime minister urged the international community to extend its support for continuing the democratic and constitutional process as well as maintaining peace and stability in Bangladesh.

She also reiterated her strong stance against terrorism, religious fundamentalism and corruption.

"The war crimes trial will continue and the verdicts in the trial will be executed," she said.

Hasina said strong measures would be taken to save trade and business from political violence and bring back normalcy to public life.

She thanked voters for what she said casting ballots through braving the opposition's obstructions. "This election marks a victory for democracy and defeat for the anti-liberation and anti-democratic forces."

The AL chief said those who believe in terrorism and violence, not in democracy, had boycotted the polls.

"The opposition, by all means, tried to prevent people from going to the polling centres. They enforced blockades and hartals, bombed and attacked people and voting stations. Despite all these, people turned up at the centres and cast their ballots."

"In some places, the BNP-Jamaat men made sudden attacks and set fire to schools. We have taken note of these incidents with utmost seriousness. None [of the culprits] will be spared. Tough action will be taken against them."

Hasina said compensation would be given to the families of the law enforcers who were killed or wounded at the hands of opposition men.

The PM answered at least a dozen questions from reporters.

On the polls, she said voting took place

peacefully at 18,000 centres across the country and a few isolated incidents happened after the opposition made threats through "a Laden-style video message."

"I don't think that there can be any complaints over the polls."

Bangladesh was moving forward and progress would continue if stability could be maintained in the country, she said.

Asked whether there was any possibility of international sanctions following the one-sided polls, Hasina said, "Why sanctions? What has Bangladesh done that it will have to face sanctions?"

"Those who don't believe in democracy and the spirit of the Liberation War might work for having sanctions slapped on Bangladesh. But they won't succeed since people are with us," she said.

About media reports on corruption by ministers, lawmakers and AL leaders in the last five years, Hasina said action would be taken against whoever was found guilty of indulging in corruption.

The PM said she had never protected any corrupt person in her party. "If there is an unusual rise in wealth, the independent ACC [the Anti-Corruption Commission] will look into it and take action."

Asked whether the government would ban the Jamaat from politics for its recent activities, Hasina said a writ petition on the issue was pending with the High Court, and she didn't want to comment until the court decided on it.

Replying to another query, Hasina said she was ready to sit for a dialogue with anyone in the interest of the country.

Noting that people were not observing the opposition's shutdowns, Hasina said hartals, acts of violence and killings must be put to stop.

About the formation of a new cabinet, the PM said she would decide on it after talking to her party's allies.

Acknowledging the opposition's role in parliament, Hasina said she would have no objection to forming an all-party government to run the country.

AL General Secretary Syed Ashrafur Islam, party leaders Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta and Obaidul Quader were also present.

Later, leaders of the AL and its associate bodies and the newly-elected lawmakers sat with the PM and discussed the current political situation. They congratulated her on the holding of the crucial election despite immense pressure at home and abroad.

politicians are up to?"

A few parents said they had spent their hard-earned money on their children's education, and if such a political situation continued it would deal a blow to them.

Children faced tremendous problems during the October-November session due to violent political programmes.

"We are scared this time as well. We don't know when the politicians will stop [these]," said Fahadul Alam, a guardian from Gulshan.

"We request the political parties not to extend the hartal for the sake of the children's future," said another guardian from Lalmatia.

Mohitur Rahman, a teacher of Dhanmondi Tutorial in the capital, said the British Council would be requested to hold the tests at any cost.

Meanwhile, five guardians submitted a memorandum to the security personnel of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, urging her not to enforce hartal or blockade from January 7 to January 29 so that A- and O-level students could take their exams uninterrupted.

The team went to the BNP chief's Gulshan residence around 6.00pm but failed to meet her as they did not have any prior appointment, said Suraiya Alam, one of the guardians.

Classes reopen in Philippine typhoon zone

AFP, Tacloban

Schools reopened yesterday in badly damaged central Philippine towns for the first time since one of the world's strongest storms ever to hit land killed thousands two months ago.

Crowding into makeshift classrooms built from tarpaulins and plywood, the children -- many of them still traumatised -- sat quietly as teachers tried to engage them in friendly banter.

Mothers refused to leave the tents despite appeals from teachers to let the children slowly resume their daily routine, an AFP reporter said.

"Only about 50 percent of our school's nearly 1,000 pupils are back," lamented principal Maria Evelyn Encina in the seaside village of San Roque near the central city of Tacloban, where giant tsunami-like waves triggered by Super Typhoon Haiyan wiped out entire neighbourhoods.

She said at least nine students had been among the dead, although the fate of many others and their families remained unknown.

"They could be in evacuation centres or taken in by their relatives in the mass evacuation that followed," Encina said. "But we can't know for sure. We just want to let them know wherever they are that we are here waiting for them."

No major incident

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Pickets were not seen on the streets during the shutdown that comes alongside the ongoing countrywide roads, rail and waterways blockade of the opposition.

Although life in the capital was not much affected by and large, business activities were disrupted more or less due to fear of picket attacks as seen during hartals and blockades in the past few months.

Train and launch services were operational. Intercity bus services, however, remained suspended.

A large number of motorised vehicles, except buses and trucks, were seen plying the roads outside the capital.

A number of trees were felled on Chandpur-Comilla highway in Chandpur early yesterday to obstruct traffic movement.

At least 10 people were injured in clashes between the ruling and the opposition activists at Gobindganj and Sadullapur upazilas in Gaibandha during yesterday's hartal.

In Pataukhali, police arrested Shah Alam, ameer of Pataukhali district unit Jamaat-e-Islami.

The opposition combine announced the hartal on Sunday demanding cancellation of the 10th parliamentary elections and protesting the killing of opposition activists on the polls day.

Re-polling

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office yesterday.

The eight constituencies are Dinajpur-4, Kurigram-4, Gaibandha-1, 3 and 4, Bogra-7, Jessore-5 and Laxmipur-1.

Violence forced a suspension of voting at the 360 stations of the eight constituencies, and the results of those constituencies could not be declared because of the postponement.

On Sunday, elections were held in 147 constituencies. But voting was postponed at 539 polling centres across the country as violence took a serious turn there.

Meanwhile, Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Rakibuddin Ahmad, while talking to reporters at the EC secretariat, yesterday said it would take one or two days more to complete the process of publishing the election results.

Besides, the CEC has also sought the transfer of deputy commissioner and superintendent of police of Gaibandha for negligence in discharging their polls duties.

Hindus under threat

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elderly woman who works as a domestic help in nearby houses. Jamaat-Shibir activists looted all her belongings, even the small quantity of rice she had stored in her hut.

While talking to our Jessore correspondent, she said she now had only one item of clothing left, and that was the saree she was wearing.

Her house was destroyed as well.

According to villagers, Jamaat-Shibir activists of Prembag, Chanpadanga, Bahirghat, Beledanga and some adjacent areas threatened the voters of Malopara not to go to the polling stations.

But the villagers went to the polling centre at Chanpatola Alia Madrasa one by one to cast their vote.

Enraged, Jamaat-Shibir activists numbering about four to five hundred wreaked a two-hour mayhem from the evening. They exploded about 250 bombs, vandalised one hundred houses and torched 10 to 12 others.

There were 1,200 to 1,500 people in the village, inhabited mostly by fishermen. About 700 of them left immediately after the attack. They took shelter near Deyapara village after crossing the river Bhairab, swimming or by boat or trawler. And a number of people hid in different orchards.

Locals said they had called police, ruling Awami league leaders and the administration over the mobile phones but nobody came to help. Police were seen after 9:00pm, when it was all over.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent, during a visit yesterday afternoon found about twelve hundred people from five hundred Hindu families of Gopalpur village sheltered at a temple of Iscon (International Society for Krishna Consciousness).

Polls disappointing

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BNP-led opposition parties boycotting the election terming it a "farce".

The countries in separate statements also condemned violence in the strongest word possible and urged the political leadership in Bangladesh to do everything to halt violence and intimidation, especially against the minorities, immediately.

However, India phrased the general elections "a constitutional requirement".

India's external affairs ministry said that while it was for the people of Bangladesh to decide their own future and choose their representatives, "violence cannot and should not determine the way forward".

India is the first country that came up with an official reaction yesterday afternoon.

In response to questions on the January 5 polls, the official spokesperson of India's external affairs ministry stated: "Elections in Bangladesh on 5th January were a constitutional requirement. They are a part of the internal and constitutional process of Bangladesh."

"It is for the people of Bangladesh to decide their own future and choose their representatives in a manner that responds to their aspirations... The democratic processes must be allowed to take their own course in Bangladesh," the spokesperson said in a statement on the ministry's website.

THE US

Expressing disappointment, the United States said, "With more than half of the seats uncontested and most of the remainder offering only token opposition, the results of the just-concluded elections do not appear to credibly express the will of the Bangladeshi people."

In a press statement yesterday night, Deputy Spokesperson of the US State Department Marie Harf said "....It remains to be seen what form the new government will take, United States commitment to supporting the people of Bangladesh remains undiminished."

"To that end, we encourage the government of Bangladesh and opposition parties to engage in immediate dialogue to find a way to hold as soon as possible elections that are free, fair, peaceful, and credible, reflecting the will of the Bangladeshi people."

Condemning in the strongest terms the violence from all quarters that continues to mark the prevailing political impasse, the statement said, "Violence is not an acceptable element of the political process; we call on all to stop committing further violence."

"Bangladesh's political leadership -- and those who aspire to lead -- must do everything in their power to ensure law and order and refrain from supporting and fomenting violence, especially against minority communities, inflammatory rhetoric, and intimidation."

The United States called upon the government of Bangladesh to provide political space to all citizens to freely express their political views. It also called strongly on the opposition to use such space peacefully and responsibly, and for all sides to eschew violence, which is not part of democratic practice and must stop immediately.

THE UK

"Like others in the international community the UK believes that the true mark of a mature, functioning democracy is peaceful, credible elections that express the genuine will of the voters," Baroness Warsi, the UK senior foreign office minister, said yesterday.

It is therefore, she said, "disappointing that voters in more than half the constituencies did not have the opportunity to express their will at

Following a clash between Awami League and BNP supporters that left one dead and a few hundred injured, Jamaat-BNP men with sharp weapons, sticks and iron rods attacked Hindus and other Awami League supporters.

Our Dinajpur correspondent reports, at least 350 houses and 50 shops of five villages, including Pritampara, Sahapara, Profullahpara, Telipara, Madhabpara and Ajaypara of Kornai village under were damaged, set ablaze and looted.

According to locals, around 2,000 Jamaat-Shibir men armed with sharp weapons and sticks launched the attack at Kornai village around 5:30pm Sunday.

"My house was set on fire. All my valuables were burnt to ashes," said Fonibala Roy, wife of Santosh Chandra Roy. She showed our correspondent the gutted books of her daughter, an SSC examinee this year.

Several hundred Hindu men, women and children fled after the attack.

Iqbalur Rahim, lawmaker-elect of Dinajpur-3, visited some of the affected areas yesterday and asked people not to leave as the government would secure their safety.

In Chittagong too, Hindus are under threat following attacks on Sunday night in Satkania, Loahagara and Banskhalai upazilas, considered Jamaat-Shibir strongholds.

In Loahagara, Jamaat-Shibir rowdies vandalised and looted several shops owned by Hindus at Hindur Haat in Kolujan, said locals and police.

They also tried to vandalise a nearby temple, but locals resisted them, reports our Chittagong office.

Besides, the Jamaat-BNP men also attacked Hindus in Kaunia upazila of Rangpur and Nandigram upazila in Bogra, report our correspondents.

the ballot box and that turnout in most other constituencies was low."

Commenting on the election results, the British minister said the UK noted the announcement of the election results in Bangladesh "an election called in accordance with Bangladesh's constitution."

Deploing the acts of intimidation and unlawful violence from all parties and arson attacks on public establishments, Warsi said: "We are deeply concerned at the deaths of so many people, political harassment and the heightened political tensions which underlie them."

The UK urged the new government and all political parties to act in line with the interests of the people, she said in a press release issued by the British High Commission in Dhaka.

CANADA

Canada's Foreign Affairs Minister John Baird said, "Canada welcomes the major parties' willingness to consider holding a new national election and urges all parties to reach an agreement soon that would allow the next election to be truly participatory, with results that all Bangladeshis will see as credible."

Expressing dismay over the violence and controversy that marred the electoral period, the Canadian foreign minister said: "We condemn this violence in the strongest terms, particularly the senseless attacks on the most vulnerable citizens -- children, women, and religious and ethnic minorities."

"Violence as a political strategy is unacceptable. Canada calls on all parties to publicly renounce and condemn political violence."

Political instability has bred economic instability, which has caused long-term damage to Bangladesh's economy and may continue to do so, said John Baird.

"We fear that this damage has undermined Bangladesh's economic progress and developmental path," he added.

THE COMMONWEALTH

The Commonwealth, a voluntary association of 53 independent countries, also termed the 10th parliamentary elections in Bangladesh "disappointing".

"The limited levels of participation and the low voter turnout are disappointing. The acts of violence are deeply troubling and indeed are unacceptable in response to any political situation," said Commonwealth Secretary-Genera Kamalsh Sharma in a statement yesterday.

In the Commonwealth Charter, Kamalsh Sharma said, it is a shared responsibility of governments, political parties and civil society to uphold and promote democratic culture, including the inalienable right of individuals to participate in free and fair elections.

"....It is critical that Bangladesh moves quickly to find a path forward through dialogue to a more inclusive and peaceful political process in which the will of the people can be fully expressed," he said.

"The Commonwealth remains ready and willing to assist Bangladesh in advancing democratic cultures and processes, freedom of expression, the rule of law and our other shared core values, just as we offer this support to all our member countries."

The statement said the Commonwealth had been following closely the situation in Bangladesh relating to the parliamentary elections held on January 5.

However, the Commonwealth observers were not present at the polls, following an assessment that conditions were not compatible with Commonwealth election observation guidelines, particularly the need for inclusive and representative elections.

Yemen tribesmen blow up oil pipeline after checkpoint killing

AFP, Aden

Tribesmen in Yemen's restive Hadramawt province blew up a major oil pipeline in retaliation for the killing by the army of one of their men, security and industry officials said yesterday.

Hadramawt has been shaken since December 20 by protests against the central government after the army killed local tribal chief Said Ben Habrish and his bodyguards at a checkpoint.

The simmering tension erupted again on Sunday when a tribesman was killed in an

incident at an army checkpoint.

"Gunmen overnight blew up the pipeline linking Masila oilfield to Al-Daba port" in the town of Shahr on the Gulf of Aden, a local security official told AFP.

Witnesses reported seeing flames erupting from the site of the attack and an oil industry official said the flow of crude along the pipeline had come to a halt.

Local tribal chief Ahmad Bamaezz said that youths from a tribe in Hadramawt were behind the attack.