

Three Inqilab journalists

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Metropolitan Magistrate Atiqur Rahaman fixed Monday for hearing the remand and bail prayers of the three journalists.

Meanwhile, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia yesterday expressed concern and condemned the police raid on the daily's office, sealing off its printing press and arrest of three journalists.

The daily was not published yesterday.

Detectives on Thursday night raided the Inqilab office on the capital's RK Mission Road, rounded up the three newsmen, seized three computers and sealed off the press, plate-making and server rooms.

The move came hours after Sub-inspector Jahangir Alam of Wari Police Station lodged a case under the ICT act and the penal code accusing Inqilab Editor AMM Bahauddin and three other journalists.

They have been accused of running a "baseless" report on Thursday claiming that Indian forces had taken part in operations in Satkhira ahead of the January 5 parliamentary polls.

KHALEDA EXPRESSES CONCERN

In a statement, Khaleda said the government has sealed off the Inqilab's press with an intention to disrupt its publication.

She demanded the authorities open all the "closed media houses", including the Bangla daily Amar Desh and private television stations Channel 1, Diganta TV and

Upazila polls next target

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for holding polls to over 100 upazila parishes to start with.

"The BNP may take the upazila elections seriously in efforts to bounce back, after its failure to resist the parliamentary election. So, we will try to maintain strict party discipline to make sure that dissidents do not run against the party-backed candidates," an AL presidium member told The Daily Star yesterday.

The presidium member, who is also an influential minister, said they would request party chief Sheikh Hasina to take steps in this regard.

Contacted, Matia Chowdhury, another AL presidium member, said they pledged in their manifesto to strengthen the upazila parishes.

"We will do it this time. We will take necessary measures so that upazila parishes can offer better services to people," said Matia, also the agriculture minister.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has already instructed some grassroots leaders, particularly those who were not picked for the January 5 national election, to get ready for the upazila election, insiders said.

Upazila elections are non-partisan in nature. So, the AL will back leaders who have clean image and public support to secure victory, said Mahbubul Alam Hanif, AL joint general secretary.

AFM Bahauddin Nasim, an organising secretary of the party, echoed his view, adding: "We are taking the upazila elections very seriously."

The AL central working committee is likely to discuss the upazila election issue at its meeting today, said Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, another organising secretary.

In the last upazila elections held on January 22, 2009, AL men secured chairman posts in about 400 out of 479 upazilas. Such a big win came following the December 2008 general election in which the AL won a

Islamic Television.

She also called for unconditional release of all journalists, including Amar Desh acting editor Mahmudur Rahman.

PRESS CLOSED TEMPORARILY: INU

Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu yesterday said the "false" report run by Inqilab could spoil the Bangladesh-India border.

The report could also incite the people of Bangladesh and insult the joint force members, he told journalists after an executive committee meeting of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) at its Bangabandhu Avenue office.

Also president of the JSD, Inu said the paper's press has been closed temporarily and its publication has not been cancelled.

Running a false and rumor-based report is a grave offence under the ICT act, mentioned the minister.

"Danger is not over yet although the election has been held and we've won it. Our important leader and former prime minister [BNP chairperson] is involved in a conspiracy against democracy. Our journey will be successful when the trial of war criminals is finished and the militancy is uprooted," he added.

Dhaka Reporters Unity yesterday staged demonstrations in front of the Jatiya Press Club protesting the police raid on the Inqilab office and arrest of its journalists. It demanded release of the newsmen within 48 hours.

three-fourths majority.

However, the AL-led government made MPs advisers to the upazila parishes, allowing them to meddle in the functions of these local bodies, considered as the centre of local development.

The AL has again won a three-fourths majority in the January 5 polls, held amid boycott by the BNP-led 18-party alliance.

"This time, we want to remove conflicting relations between lawmakers and upazila parishes for the sake of local development," a government policymaker told this newspaper, requesting anonymity.

According to the policymaker, the BNP will definitely extend its support to its grassroots leaders to win the election. "These are local polls and it will not be possible for the BNP to prevent its leaders from running."

BNP insiders, however, said they were yet to decide if they would contest or boycott. The party has yet to overcome its shock from its failure to resist the general election.

Its grassroots are also divided.

"We have no interest in the upazila election as the general election has been over without us," said Mozahar Ali Prodhan, president of Joypurhat district BNP.

Amirul Islam, general secretary of Meherpur district BNP, is of the same opinion.

But Dinajpur district BNP President Lutfar Rahman Mintoo is in favour of joining the race. "We will do better than the Awami League. And this win will encourage our local leaders to intensify the anti-government movement."

All of them, however, are waiting for the party directives.

Contacted, BNP Standing Committee Member Lt Gen (retd) Mahbubur Rahman said they were yet to make any decision in this regard.

"But personally, I think our party should extend support to the grassroots leaders, to give people a chance to vote against the

POLITICS AND ELECTION

The European Parliament in its 11-point strongly worded resolution condemned the widespread violence which erupted in the run-up to the January elections and express concern at the paralysis of every-day life in Bangladesh.

The EP urged that prompt, independent and transparent investigations be carried out into the recent cases of violent deaths before and after the elections, and that the perpetrators, including those in the security services, be brought to justice.

It calls on Dhaka to immediately halt all repressive methods used by the security forces, including indiscriminate firing with live ammunition and torture in custody.

"The opposition politicians, subject to arbitrary arrest, should be released, parties having a democratic reputation need to develop a culture of mutual respect, and parties which turn to terrorist acts should be banned," it said.

It said the EU should use every means available to assist a process seeking "a compromise which would give the Bangladeshi people a chance to express their democratic choice in a representative way."

It believes that all options should be considered, including "an early election if all legitimate political parties are willing to stand and offer voters a choice" the resolution said.

Regretting failure of the Bangladeshi Parliament and the political parties to reach on an inclusive mechanism for the elections, the EU also calls on the government and the opposition to put the best interests of Bangladesh first as a matter of urgency and to find a compromise

Smuggler guides Syrians across perilous frontier

AFP, Kilis

For a modest fee Ibrahim leads Syrians across the Turkish border, one of many services his organisation, the Al-Qaeda affiliated Al-Nusra Front, provides to those in need.

On a recent day he led a line of taxis up a muddy road through olive groves toward Turkey's border with Syria, where dozens of Syrians clutching overstuffed suitcases and burlap sacks waited on the other side to get across.

Thousands have fled following an outbreak of clashes pitting Islamist and moderate rebels against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), a feared Al-Qaeda affiliate with roots in the Iraq war.

Not illegal

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as a shadow UN general assembly at the Army Golf Club.

The last election was not participated by all and another election is now required, he observed.

"Democracy will return to the country as soon as the two alliances hold another election," he reiterated.

He said democracy was not limited to only elections and change of power, democracy is the establishment of rule of law and the right to freedom of expression.

The two political parties need to transform equally and change their behaviour to ensure rights of everybody.

"If the two parties can restore the rights of the citizens, it will be the biggest achievement of democracy," he said, adding that it could be done with the concerted efforts of the two parties working together.

About recent communal violence, Sir Abed said, "Communal harmony is the key word of our democracy. Our constitution enshrines equal rights."

As his attention was drawn to the demand for banning Jamaat-e-Islami on the grounds of unleashing countrywide violence, Abed said, "It is not that the violence would stop if Jamaat was banned. If the violence could be stopped by banning it, then it should be banned." He said sometimes a ban could make the situation worse.

He said if it was possible to stop the violence without banning Jamaat then that should be the aim. "They [Jamaat activists] could go underground if the party was banned."

Govt foot-dragging

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The home ministry is yet to appoint a contractor even though it had selected local firm Data Edge two months ago to issue MRPs for Malaysian expatriates.

It was very slow in completing formalities. Ministry's indecision over whether or not the project required purchase committee's clearance also delayed things.

"We first thought there was no need for approval. But later we changed our decision," said Additional Secretary Shafiqur Rahman of the home ministry, who is dealing with the Malaysian project.

Senior Secretary of the home ministry CQK Mustaq Ahmed said the project had been sent to the purchase committee for approval.

"Since this is a new type of project, we are taking time to make it foolproof," he told The Daily Star, claiming that the government would be able to provide all expatriates with MRPs before the deadline ended.

The project's estimated cost is Tk 80 crore. As per rules, any project that costs Tk 50 crore or more requires purchase committee's clearance. But the home ministry was confused over the matter as the entire project's cost would be met by the fees charged on expatriates.

Syed Ahsan Habib of Data Edge said they have to get work permits from Malaysian government to set up offices and for those who would work there, which were all time-consuming and difficult jobs.

"We will start working soon after we ink the deal with the government," he told The Daily Star.

Data Edge would set up eight offices for collecting data of Bangladeshi workers. The data would be sent to Agargaon passport office for printing MRPs and then the passports would be sent back to the Data Edge offices for distribution among the expatriates.

For each passport, the government would pay Data Edge \$18.

However, the government is yet to make progress in issuing MRPs for expats in the UAE. Several local and internal firms submitted bids on November 24, 2013, to get the job to provide MRPs to nearly 10 lakh workers in the country but almost nothing has been done since.

Asked why the process appeared stalled, Project Director Brig Gen Masud Rezwan said the process would start again after the purchase committee approved the Malaysian project.

Delink with Jamaat

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BNP is continuing to cooperate with Jamaat-e-Islami and the splinter group Hefajat-e-Islam, which are regarded as the main instigators of the violence."

Immediately after the pronouncement of a verdict on February 28 last year sentencing Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Sayeedee to death on war crimes charges, Jamaat-Shibir activists had unleashed unprecedented violence in many parts of the country.

In the violent protest that continued for more than a week, armed cadres of Jamaat-Shibir clashed with law enforcers leaving more than 70 people, including eight policemen, dead.

Jamaat-Shibir men continued their violent activities round the year. And after the announcement of the election schedule on November 25, they again unleashed violence to enforce the BNP-led alliance's hartal and blockades to resist the January 5 election. More than 140 people were killed in the violence in around last two months.

The European Parliament said during and after the polls, thousands of citizens belonging to vulnerable minority groups, particularly Hindus, have been violently attacked and chased from their homes, reportedly mainly by Jamaat-e-Islami militants, for reasons partly linked to the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) trials, as many of the prosecution witnesses are Hindus.

The joint motion of resolution, moved by the MEPs on behalf of the PPE, S&D, ALDE, Verts/ALE, ECR and GUE/NGL groups, focused on fundamental freedoms, human rights and democracy in general in Bangladesh.

which would give the Bangladeshi people a chance to express their democratic choice.

Underlining Bangladeshi's reputation as a tolerant society within a secular state, the EP calls on the Bangladeshi authorities to provide increased protection for ethnic and religious minorities at risk and to ensure effective prosecution of all instigators of intercommunal violence.

'ABOLISH DEATH PENALTY'

The EP expressed concern at the increasing number of people on death row in Bangladesh, besides the six individuals sentenced by the ICT, and in particular at the sentencing to death of 152 erstwhile BDR soldiers over a bloody mutiny in 2009.

The EP calls on Dhaka to abolish the death penalty and to commute all death sentences; calls also on the authorities to urgently set up an effective mechanism to protect witnesses in cases before the ICT.

The resolution also called on the government "to revise the Information and Communication Technology Act and the Anti-Terrorism Act, which were made more stringent under the last government and can lead to the arbitrary criminalisation of citizens."

It believes that all options should be considered, including "an early election if all legitimate political parties are willing to stand and offer voters a choice" the resolution said.

Regrettably failure of the Bangladeshi Parliament and the political parties to reach on an inclusive mechanism for the elections, the EU also calls on the government and the opposition to put the best interests of Bangladesh first as a matter of urgency and to find a compromise

second consecutive term, said a foreign ministry press release yesterday.

In a separate message, William Lacy Swing, the director general of IOM, also greeted the new government of Bangladesh following the recent election in the country.

Magical Uttam-Suchitra

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author Maitreyee B Chowdhury pays a tribute to the unparalleled star-duo of Bengali cinema.

The writer says that platonic or spiritual, their mutual admiration was palpable and infectious. Both shared much more than their films and would even look to each other for solace in times both good and bad.

"The two had tremendous respect for each other, too. Uttam and Suchitra's relationship was based on mutual trust, appreciation and admiration for each other's work and personality... They maintained a dignified presence in public. Interestingly, whenever Suchitra was asked to define her relationship with Uttam, she was brief with her words.

"She would usually dismiss it as 'just friends'. Uttam admitted to having not only a soft corner for Suchitra, but also that he was in awe of her as a co-actor, as well as a person. 'Yes I loved her, but this love is of a different kind and genre', she writes.

Starting off in 1952 with Shesh Kothay which never got a release, Suchitra Sen came to the notice the following year with two very different roles - as Bishnupriya, the wife of Sri Chaitanya deb in Bhagaban Srikrishna Chaitanya and as Romola in the hilarious and an evergreen box-office hit Saare Chuattor. Saare Chuattor is the film which launched the Suchitra Sen - Uttam Kumar pair even though they were not the main attraction of the film.

The Tollygunje industry was then looking for a new hero and a new star couple to bank on following Pramathes Barua's stupendous popularity and Kanan Devi's lifting ebulience. The rest of the '50s saw history being made in the Bengali film industry with Uttam Kumar and Suchitra Sen being the first superhit couple on screen - the 20 odd films in that decade gave them prominence and stardom which probably no other stars till date can match.

With Sagarika, Saptmochan, Sabar Uporey, Shilpi, Harano Sur, Patho Holo Deri, Jibon Trishna, Indrani, Chawa Pawa to name a few the duos mesmerized the Bengali audience.

With the Nehruvian ideal of a nuclear family for modern India getting popular as a concept, most of these films veered round the village boy finding settlement in the urban Indian city - and again it is the man-woman couplet which faces off the societal struggles, the modern partnership which is self-sufficient and less dependent on the greater support from the joint-family back in the village.

Coupled with soulful music and Hemanta Mukherjee's unmistakeable melody playback for Uttam these films are still holding a lot of attention when telecast in Television, albeit mostly to the older generation.

It is interesting to note that during this first decade itself it was Suchitra who ventured outside of Bengal to the Hindi film industry in Bombay - a phenomenon not prevalent among Bengal actors back then. Most notable amongst these is Sen's remarkable portrayal as Paro in Bimal Roy's legendary Devdas (1955) which immediately brought her into national limelight.

Two years later Suchitra featured in Hrishikesh Mukherjee's debut Hindi film Musafir which was written by none other than Ritwik Ghatak. In 1960 Suchitra Sen paired opposite of Dev Anand in Bombai ka Babu and Sarhad making her an eminent presence in Indian cinema.

The 1960s reflect as an interesting decade not only for Suchitra Sen but also for Uttam Kumar and the Bengali film industry. Suchitra didn't appear in any notable production in