

AL fanning communalism

Alleges Fakhrul

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Thakurgaon*

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday accused the ruling Awami League of spreading communalism in the country by carrying out terrorist activities.

Political conflicts led to the violence on the polling day (January 5) at different villages in Thakurgaon Sadar upazila, he added.

The BNP leader was talking to local people at Gopalpur Govt Primary School premises after visiting the family members of deceased BNP activist Abu Hanif at Shimuldangi village in the same upazila.

Earlier, he offered prayers at Hanif's grave and pledged to bear the livelihood costs of Hanif's daughter.

Fakhru also visited some damaged shops of Hindus at Deunia Bazar of Gopalpur village.

He claimed that Awami League goons had stabbed Abu Hanif to death at Gopalpur village on January 5. The AL men and police also killed Joynal and Harun at Basudebpur village in Thakurgaon on the same day, he mentioned.

The government, he said, oppresses people by using the Rab, police and BGB. In the name of arresting unidentified accused, the police and security men have been extorting innocent people, he complained.

He demanded the police stop harassment of people immediately.

The AL is now running the country through

repression eying to establish Bakshal in a new form as the party knows it well that it will not return to power through a free, fair and credible election, noted the BNP leader.

He added: The AL has formed an "illegal government" as nobody at home and abroad has added the January 5 election was free and fair.

Fakhru urged people and party activists to continue the anti-government movement in a peaceful manner for restoring democracy and reclaiming people's voting rights.

Secretary general of district unit BNP Toimur Rahman, joint secretary Obaidullah Masud and convener of district Jubo Dal Abu Nur were present, among others.

On January 5, three BNP activists were killed and around 60 people, including several police and Ansar men, were injured as BNP-Jamaat activists clashed with law enforcers and ruling party men at different unions of Thakurgaon Sadar upazila.

Of the dead, Joynal and Harun of Khagrabari village were killed when police opened fire on a group of BNP-Jamaat activists who tried to occupy the Basudebpur Govt Primary School polling centre around 1:00pm.

Abu Hanif, another BNP activist from Shimuldangi village, died during a clash between the ruling party and BNP-Jamaat men at Goreya Gopalpur Govt Primary School centre around 3:00pm. The clash ensued when the opposition men tried to stop polling at the centre.

Rafsanjani's daughter jailed in Iran

AFP, *Tehran*

Iran yesterday handed a daughter of former president Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani a suspended jail sentence for spreading lies about the authorities, her lawyer told the official IRNA news agency.

"The verdict was issued by the court and my client has been sentenced to a six-month suspended jail term," Vahid Abolmoalaye said.

Fatemeh Hashemi's sentence was suspended for the next two years, said Abolmoalaye, adding that he would appeal against the sentence.

Her trial was held at a branch of Tehran's revolutionary court on January 18.

The media reported that she made comments against the powerful Larijani brothers who head Iran's legislative and judiciary bodies.

Her father is an influential cleric who was president from 1989 to 1997 and is seen as a moderate figure close to the reformist camps.

Faezeh Hashemi, another of Rafsanjani's daughters, was arrested and imprisoned in late 2012 for six months for "propaganda against the regime".

Her brother, Mehdi Hashemi, was also arrested in 2012 after he returned from abroad. He was later freed on bail.

Both Mehdi and Faezeh Hashemi were accused of involvement in 2009 street protests that erupted after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was given a second presidential term in an election the opposition said was marked by fraud.

Japan's PM defends dolphin hunting

AFP, *Tokyo*

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has defended Japan's dolphin hunting and asked the world to understand that the controversial tradition is part of its culture and financially supports fishing communities.

The annual catch, in which residents of Taiji village corral hundreds of dolphins into a secluded bay and kill them, sparked renewed global criticism after US ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy tweeted her concern earlier this month at the "inhumaneness" of the hunt.

But Abe defended the traditional catch.

"The dolphin fishing that takes place in Taiji town is an ancient fishing practice rooted in their culture... and supports their livelihoods," he told CNN in an interview uploaded onto the broadcaster's Japanese website late Friday.

"We hope you will understand this," he added, noting that he was aware of criticism of the hunt.

"In every country and region, there are practices and ways of living and culture that have been handed down from ancestors," the premier added. "Naturally, I feel that these should be respected."

Activists from the international militant environmental group Sea Shepherd have streamed live footage of the dolphin capture in Taiji, which caught the worldwide spotlight in 2010 when it became the subject of the Academy Award-winning documentary "The Cove".

Defenders of the hunt say it is a tradition and point out that the animals it targets are not endangered, a position echoed by the Japanese government.

Pir's surviving son

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The criminals had spared the women, including Abdullah's mother Salma, sister Runi and sister-in-law Bithi, who were at home at that time.

They told journalists after the December 21 incident that before leaving the house the killers had searched for Abdullah.

"We have come here to kill six people and we have done so. But it is Abdullah we have meant to kill," the killers had told the women.

Talking to The Daily Star, Abdullah refused to reveal his whereabouts.

The surviving members of the family have moved out of the house in Gopibagh.

"We just could not live anymore in the house where our father and brother had been killed," Abdullah said.

He even left his job as a banker in Bank Asia. Asked why he had quit the job, he said he feared to go out.

Abdullah added a cousin of him was supporting his family now.

But police did not take any step for his security.

"I still have faith that they [police] will be able to catch the killers. But if they fail I may need security."

The investigation officer of the case, Inspector Abul Khayer Matabbar of the Detective Branch of Dhaka Metropolitan Police said, "We have some suspects and are communicating with them. A few suspects are on the run. I believe if we can find them, the investigation will gain momentum."

In line with the initial hunches about the motive of the murders, Matabbar said he too suspected that the killings were committed over religious differences.

"Lutfar was known to be a deviant for his religious practice and preaching of faith. He had made many enemies in the process," he added.

Lutfar Rahman Faruque had published three books on his interpretation of Islam.

Of a heartless

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However, Ayesha denied having tortured the girl and said she did not order Tamanna to boil water.

"I once beat her lightly as she has a habit of frequent urination," said Ayesha adding, "I treat her as my daughter and will bear the expenses of her treatment."

Tamanna is the second among four children of Saleha and rickshaw van driver Md Momin.

Yemen marks end of thorny nat'l dialogue

AFP, *Sanaa*

Yemen's feuding factions wrapped up months of national dialogue yesterday aimed at drafting a new constitution and establishing a federal state in a country where southerners are clamouring for independence.

Secessionists boycotted the talks launched in March 2013 as part of a UN-backed transition that saw president Ali Abdullah Saleh step down after 33 years in power following massive Arab Spring-inspired protests in the region's poorest country.

Saleh's successor, President Abdrabuh Mansur Hadi, pledged at a ceremony on Saturday to form commissions to draft the new constitution and thrash out the details of the promised new federation.

"All (sides) have made painful concessions," Hadi said of the dialogue which had been due to last six months but was extended for another four in the face of bitter disagreements over key issues.

"This is a historic day," said UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in a recorded video message played during the ceremony.

His envoy to Yemen, Jamal Benomar, who

has been overseeing the implementation of the peace deal, hailed the outcome of the dialogue as a "clear roadmap".

"The dialogue was not a picnic, and faced tough challenges," said Benomar, adding that the Yemeni people "should be proud of this achievement".

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton in a statement called the process "a unique and historic achievement".

"It has brought Yemen closer to democracy and to the aspirations of its people for a more secure and prosperous future," she said.

Southerners have strongly opposed proposals for a federation of six units -- four in the north and two in the south -- instead of one each for the formerly independent north and south, fearing that their influence would be diluted.

"We will work as soon as possible to form a regions committee and another to draft a constitution," Hadi said at the ceremony attended by representatives of the United Nations, the Arab League and Gulf states.

"We still have a long way to go to implement the document," said the president, who is himself originally from the south.

690 chairman hopefuls

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certain number of women members from reserved seats, chairmen of all union parishads and the municipality mayor, if any.

The EC on January 19 announced that elections to 102 upazila parishads out of 487 will be held on February 19 in first phase. However, it later postponed elections to four upazila parishads of Rangpur due to complications over demarcation of boundaries.

As per the schedule, yesterday was the last day for filing nomination papers, while scrutiny of the nomination papers will be done tomorrow. The last day for withdrawing candidature is February 3.

On Thursday, the EC announced that elections to 117 upazila parishads will be held on February 27.

Moreover, the EC plans to hold elections to 74 upazila parishads on March 15, 72 on March 25, 65 on March 31, and 57 upazila parishads on May 3.

The last election to 479 upazila parishads was held on January 22, 2009.

BY-POLLS TO UNION PARISHADS

Govt's days are numbered

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chiefs of the other alliance components, was present in last night's programme, where Zafar presented a bouquet to Khaleda.

In her speech, Khaleda welcomed Zafar's Jatiya Party for its "right decision" to join the alliance. "He [Zafar] is a veteran politician. We will get good advice from him," she observed.

"From now on ours has turned into a 19-party alliance. You all know 19 is a very lucky number. The 19-party will bring good news for the country and ensure welfare of the people in the year 2014. People will reward us if we can work together."

Terming the BNP and its allies "pro-liberation force", Khaleda said, "We're the party of freedom fighters who had fought on

The EC mulls holding by-elections to 76 union parishads by March as the posts of either chairman or other office bearers of these UPs remain vacant following their death or resignation.

"The process of holding by-elections to these union parishads is at initial stage. The election commissioners will make the final decision in this regard," an EC official told this correspondent.

There are over 4,500 union parishads across the country. Elections to more than 4,000 UPs were held in 2011 and to the rest in phases. Tenure of these UPs will expire in 2016.

WPB PICKS WOMAN MP NOMINEE

The Workers Party of Bangladesh (WPB) yesterday sent a letter to the EC informing that the party has nominated its politburo member Hazera Sultana for a reserved seat for women in the 10th parliament.

The party won six seats in the new parliament. As per ratio, the WPB will get one reserved seat.

The 50 reserved seats for women will be allocated to the political parties as per ratio of their seats in parliament.

the battlefields, while the Awami League is the party of freedom fighters who had only crossed the border."

Describing the agitation against the January 5 polls as successful, the BNP chief said such protest across the country except in Dhaka did not take place even during the 1971 Liberation War.

Khaleda once again alleged it was the Awami League men who attacked the Hindus and looted and damaged their property to divert people's attention from the farcical polls.

Kazi Zafar said the country's independence was now at stake and democracy was dead.

The opposition leaders and activists must not get frustrated over the January 5 election, he added.

Raped before they reach 14

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month after being raped by her uncle.

In late November last year, a 13-year-old girl from Lakshmipur was mutilated after her cousin hurled acid at her because she had refused to enter a relationship with him.

A four-year-old child was raped in Nilphamari in November by her neighbour.

The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics conducted the survey titled "Violence Against Women Survey 2011" in collaboration with the United Nations Population Fund (UNPF).

The survey interviewed 12,600 women randomly chosen across all seven divisions with equitable distribution to ensure nationwide coverage.

"Most of the younger girls who are targeted belong to lower or lower-middle class. They get raped because they lack the kind of protection that we can give to our children. They are forced out of the security of their home or left home alone," said Gita Chakrabarty, senior deputy director of Child Rights Unit of Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK).

Girls selling flowers on the streets are some of the most common targets of sexual violence, added Chakrabarty.

"Just the other day I had to deal with the rape of a 10-year-old girl who was left home alone by her domestic worker mother. The mother used to pay a neighbour to look after her, but

the incident occurred nevertheless," said Chakrabarty.

A UN study asked respondents, who were convicted rapists, about the reason behind their crime. Around 67 percent said they had raped for fun, while around 82.3 percent said they believed it was their sexual entitlement as men.

An astonishing 33.9 percent of them reported that they had never felt remorse for their crimes.

The study titled "Prevalence of and factors associated with non-partner rape perpetration: findings from the UN multi-country and cross sectional on men and women in Asia and the Pacific" was conducted by several UN wings like UNWomen, UNDP and UNPFI.

The survey quizzed 2,377 men and its result was published last year.

Hamida Hossain, rights activist and founder member of Ask, told The Daily Star that men are reared up in a way where they are encouraged to apply force.

"They see the oppression of women around them and take it as normal. They are taught that to be considered a proper man one has to be tough and violent. Even as children they are handed down guns as toys. Their games involve fighting. So, they don't think twice before striking down someone who may be physically weaker," said Hossain.

Respite only after winter

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Of the total gas supplied by Titas, 32.59 percent is being used for power generation, 4.85 percent for fertiliser production, 22.26 percent for industrial purposes, 22.73 percent for captive power plants, 4.82 percent for CNG stations, 1.06 percent for commercial use and 11.69 percent for domestic use.

Moshiur said fertiliser companies and power plants were kept simultaneously operational this winter. But, it was not done in previous years considering the shortage of gas supply.

Hussain Mansur, chairman of Petrobangla, said the number of illegal gas connections to establishments in different parts of the city and its adjoining areas like Uttarkhan, Dakkhinkhan, Rupganj and Narayanganj is huge.

These illegal connections are one of the main reasons for worsening the crisis, he said, adding that there are over 24 lakh gas connections across the country. Of them, 17 lakh are in the city.

Mansur also said in many cases it becomes difficult to take action against illegal connections as local people including the users, obstruct the authority's drive to snap these connections.

However, drives against illegal connections are continuing in different areas of the city and suburbs.

According to the Titas Gas authorities, some 88,947-foot gas pipelines have been dismantled and 48 domestic connections snapped during drives in and outside the capital since September last.

US, Pakistan seek stability amid Afghan doubts

AFP, *Washington*

The United States and Pakistan resume talks next week after a three-year hiatus as they seek stability in often turbulent ties amid mutual concerns over Afghanistan's future.

Pakistan and the United States started a "strategic dialogue" in 2010 to work through their complicated relationship, but the talks were quickly frozen due to repeated crises -- including over the secret 2011 US raid that killed Osama bin Laden.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who announced a resumption of the talks during a visit to Islamabad in August, will hold the dialogue Monday in Washington with Sartaj Aziz, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's national security adviser.

A US official said that the talks would look at both security and economic cooperation and seek to build a "blueprint" for futures.

"Having seen the highs and lows of this relationship," the official said on condition of anonymity, "both countries have put an enormous amount of effort into assiduously putting this relationship on firmer grounding over the last year and a half."

The United States, which formed an uneasy partnership with Pakistan after the September 11, 2001 attacks, is seeking Islamabad's assistance again as it pulls tens of thousands of troops from Afghanistan this year and Washington ends its longest-ever war.

US President Barack Obama's administration has grown frustrated as Afghan President

Hamid Karzai holds off on signing a security agreement that would allow a smaller number of troops from the United States and the rest of the Nato alliance to stay in a support role.

"I think our analysis and Pakistan's analysis are pretty much the same -- that an abrupt termination in the Nato and American presence there would be destabilizing, would incentivize Taliban and other militant groups and would demoralize significant elements of the population," another US official said.

Since sweeping to power last year, Sharif has notched down Pakistan's often strident tone that had grated on US officials. In a meeting with Obama in October, Sharif pledged to work for better relations with Afghanistan and historic rival India.

But whatever his intentions, Sharif may face limits in assisting the United States. Opposition supporters led by former cricketer Imran Khan have blocked a key trucking route into Afghanistan.

Pakistan has also been torn by internal violence. More than 400 Shia Muslims were killed in targeted attacks last year with Sunni extremists enjoying virtual impunity, according to a recent Human Rights Watch report.

Sharif is seen in Washington "as potentially a strong partner because he has a strong political position, which was not the case with the previous government," said Shuja Nawaz, director of the Atlantic Council's South Asia Center.

Anti-government protests spread across Ukraine

AFP, *Kiev*

The anti-government protests in Ukraine yesterday spread to the north and east of the country as demonstrators sought to seize regional administration offices that have been occupied in over half a dozen regions in the west.

Demonstrators were still occupying regional administration buildings in Lviv and other regions across the pro-EU west of Ukraine that they have seized in a major blow for President Viktor Yanukovich.

But in a new development, protesters were seeking to seize buildings in regions north and east of the capital Kiev, in a sign the protest mood was spreading across the country.

Protesters were storming the regional administration in the region of Poltava east of Kiev, Ukrainian media reports said.

A similar attempt to seize control of the main local administration building was also

underway in Chernigiv region north of Kiev on the border with Belarus, the reports added.

Demonstrators had earlier seized control of the regional administration building in the region of Vinnytsia just to the west of Kiev, undeterred by stun grenades used by riot police.

Governors of Ukrainian regions are appointed by Yanukovich and have now become targets of protesters seeking to bring about change not just in Kiev but across the country.

As well as Lviv, protesters are already controlling administration buildings in the western regions of Ternopil, Rivne, Khmelnytsky, Lutsk, Ivano-Frankivsk and Chernivtsi.

No such actions have been reported in the Donbass region of the east of Ukraine, the home region of Yanukovich which has largely remained loyal to the president throughout the crisis.

almost two years ago, when Polchinski and his team began investigating what would happen to an astronaut who fell into a black hole.

They hypothesised that instead of being gradually ripped apart by gravitational forces, the event horizon would be transformed into a 'highly energetic region', and anyone who fell in would hit a wall of fire and burn to death in an instant - violating Albert Einstein's theory of relativity.

In his paper, Hawking writes: "The absence of event horizons means that there are no black holes - in the sense of regimes from which light can't escape to infinity."

He told Nature journal: "There is no escape from a black hole in classical theory, but quantum theory, however, "enables energy and information to escape from a black hole."

Don Page, a physicist and expert on black holes at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada told Nature that "the picture Hawking gives sounds pretty reasonable".

"You could say that it is radical to propose there's no event horizon", he said. "But these are highly quantum conditions, and there's ambiguity about what space-time even is, let alone whether there is a definite region that can be marked as an event horizon."