

BNP, allies mull anti-govt movement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP-led 19-party opposition alliance last night decided to wage an all-out movement over public issues and the abduction of Abu Bakar Siddique, husband of environment activist Syeda Rizwana Hasan.

The chiefs of the alliance made the decision at a meeting at Khaleda Zia's Gulshan office in the capital, meeting sources said.

The meeting also decided to wage a tougher movement against price hike of electricity, forced disappearance and demanding fair share of Teesta waters, said Mostafizur Rahman Khan, chairman of Bangladesh Labour Party, a component in the alliance.

No dates or types of the programmes have been set, but party secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has been assigned to finalise the programmes to protest Siddique's abduction.

"After taking to the streets, we will not return home this time until we force the government to hold elections under a nonparty administration," a meeting source quoted Khaleda as saying.

At least seven killed in eastern Nigeria violence: police

AFP, Kano

At least seven people were killed in ethnic and religious violence in eastern Nigeria's Taraba state, police said yesterday, with local residents putting the toll at 20.

Violence erupted in the town of Wukari on Tuesday through Wednesday when Christian Jukun gunmen attacked their Muslim Hausa-Fulani neighbours in a reprisal attack following fighting in a nearby village, state police spokesman Joseph Kwaji told AFP.

"Seven people were killed in the violence which started late Tuesday and continued overnight," he said. He said some 40 homes were razed in the violence, the latest to hit the deeply divided state in recent months.

"Jukun youths launched reprisal attacks on the Hausa-Fulani following an earlier bloody encounter with their kinsmen in neighbouring Nwunkyo-Kura village," Kwaji said.

He said soldiers and police had deployed to contain the violence, but added that no arrests had been made.

Residents said the Jukuns had joined their kinsmen in Nwunkyo-Kura on Tuesday to fight suspected Fulani attackers who stormed the village from neighbouring Plateau state.

Ali Shehu, a Wukari resident, said he personally counted 14 bodies after the violence and was told of six other corpses found in different parts of the town.

German court jails Somali pirate for 12 years

AFP, Berlin

A German court Thursday sentenced a Somali pirate chief to 12 years in jail for hijacking a ship off the Horn of Africa and tormenting its crew during an eight-month ordeal.

The 44-year-old man was found guilty of kidnapping and extortion charges over the May 2010 attack off Oman on the chemical tanker Marida Marguerite which had 22 crew aboard.

The hostages were only released in December of that year after a \$5 million (3.6-million-euro) ransom was paid by the German shipping company that owns the Marshall Islands-flagged vessel.

The pirate commander was arrested in May 2013 when he applied for refugee status in Germany, using false papers. He was identified by his fingerprints, and later by witnesses flown in by the court from India.

The man, who was not named, has one week to appeal the sentence, which was short of the maximum 15-year-term, but more than the seven years demanded by the defence.

During the hostage ordeal, the mostly Indian crew suffered "cruel treatment, torture and mock executions," said a statement by the court in northwestern city of Osnabrueck.



The 12 migrant workers at the Shahjalal International Airport yesterday after their return from Iran. They had been abducted in Iran and held hostage there for months.

PHOTO: STAR

11 return after paying ransom

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was subjected to forced labour.

Shafiul, who worked in the UAE as a diploma engineer, was lured by the traffickers into coming to Iran for a job in Turkey with a monthly salary of Tk 1.20 lakh.

"One of my friends Amin, who also worked in my company, came up with the offer. He introduced me to Nanu Miah in Iran, who would send me to Turkey," said Shafiul.

On December 28 last year, he along with six other migrants had reached Bandar Abbas through the Arabian Sea. Nanu then took the seven to a building and held them hostage there.

"Nanu and his cohorts beat us up and asked us to call home for ransom," said Shafiul. Fearing further torture, he gave his mother's phone number to Nanu and requested his family members to send money.

Talking to The Daily Star at the office of Criminal Investigation Department (CID), Aleya said Nanu had threatened her over the phone that her son would be chopped into pieces if she failed to pay him a ransom of Tk 6 lakh within four days.

Failing to manage the amount

within the stipulated time, she requested Nanu to extend the deadline.

"I begged for my son's life and pledged to pay the money by the next 15 days, but Nanu would not agree. He gave me the b-Kash account number of one of his local agents in Sunamganj and asked me to deposit a minimum of Tk 2 lakh in the account by two days. Later I deposited the money in the account," she added.

Bangladeshi Nanu has been in Iran for the last 30 years. A ring leader of the trafficking gang, he was arrested on March 20 in Bandar Abbas by Iranian police and is now behind bars. Shafiul was rescued by cops on that day.

However, the 11 others and 50 more Bangladeshi migrants were rescued by Iranian police in the last two months.

The rest 50 will return home by this month, Binoy Krishna Mallick, executive director of Rights Jessore, told this newspaper.

Speaking at a press conference at the CID office yesterday afternoon, Shah Alam, additional DIG of CID, said they have started working with the Iranian police to rescue

Bangladeshi migrants from the trafficking gangs.

The traffickers in Iran took about Tk 120 crore in ransom from abducted Bangladeshi migrants over the last two years, he said.

The law enforcers are also working to find out whether there are any agents of the gangs in Bangladesh and Iran.

The Bangladesh embassy in Iran on April 6 sent a letter to the senior secretary of the home ministry asking it to take stringent action against trafficking gangs at home and abroad, said the CID official.

According to the letter, around 2,000 Bangladeshis, who were either abducted or subjected to forced labour by traffickers in the Middle Eastern countries, were repatriated in the last one and a half years.

A three member CID team, said Alam, will leave Dhaka for Iran and the UAE next week to probe the abductions of migrants.

Earlier on December 22 last year, 29 Bangladeshi migrants returned home with the assistance of Rights Jessore. They were abducted in the UAE, Oman and Qatar by another Bangladeshi trafficking gang.

Syria most dangerous country for journalists: watchdog

AFP, New York

Syria is the world's most dangerous country for journalists a US-based watchdog said Wednesday as it published its annual impunity index tracking unsolved killings of reporters.

The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists reported a "rising number of targeted killings" of reporters in Syria as a recent threat to journalists operating in the war-torn country.

"With unprecedented numbers of abductions and high rates of fatalities in combat and crossfire, Syria was already the world's most dangerous country for journalists," CPJ said.

Iraq remained on top of the rankings with the worst record for solving murders of journalists. Somalia came in second with the Philippines third, the watchdog announced.

Iraq, with 100 percent impunity in 100 cases, has topped the rankings ever since the survey began in 2008.

Since then, 2012 was the first year that no journalists were killed in relation to their work in Iraq, but 2013 saw a spike to 10 journalist killings, nine of them murders, CPJ said.

Why apology?

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towards rioters, Modi told ANI TV that "I am convinced that if there is even a grain of truth in the allegations ... Modi should be hanged in the street square.

"There should be such exemplary punishment so that no one dares to commit such a crime for 100 years."

He said mere apology would serve no purpose if he was really guilty.

"If he [Modi] has really committed a crime, Modi should not be pardoned. What is the system of pardoning people through apology? There should be no apology. Modi should never be pardoned," he said.

"I have said what I had to say. Now, I am in the people's court, and I am waiting to hear their verdict."

A Supreme Court-appointed probe had cleared Modi of the charge of any complicity in nine cases related to the riots and said there was no evidence to warrant his prosecution in riot cases.

Modi said the issue of an apology and the Gujarat riots was kept alive by a "small coterie" because he went on to win successive state legislature elections in Gujarat.

The matter would have not attracted attention if he had lost, he added.

Modi was the chief minister of India's Gujarat when the riots had broken out and claimed 1,000 lives, mostly Muslims in the year 2002.

India holds biggest round

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Voter turnout in most states has been higher than in 2009, reported our New Delhi correspondent.

A total of 814 million people are eligible to vote in the polls in the nine phases as the world's largest democratic exercise began on April 7 and ends on May 12, four days before the votes are counted.

As many as 192 million people were eligible to vote yesterday's crunch time polling for BJP and Congress. The two parties, along with their alliance partners, hold between 89 of the 121 seats that were decided in the fifth phase.

Congress, in power for two terms since 2004, is widely expected to lose to the resurgent opposition Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by headline Hindu nationalist Narendra Modi.

The 63-year-old barrel-chested leader, chief minister of prosperous Gujarat state in western India, insists only he can revive the faltering economy.

A new survey this week showed for the first time the BJP and its allies attaining a majority in the 543-seat parliament. India's economic slowdown -- the economy has posted sub-five percent growth for two years in a row -- was on many voters' minds.

In its quest for return to rule India, BJP faces formidable hurdles in the form of rivals ranging from national level party Congress to several regional parties like Samajwadi Party, Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh, Janata

Dal (U) in Bihar state to Jharkhand Mukti Morcha in eastern state of Jharkhand in yesterday's polling.

Though BJP is expected to do well in Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh states where it won state polls last December, it needs to prove its mettle in UP and Bihar and retrieve ground lost to Congress in the Karnataka election in 2013.

A strong performance by BJP in UP, Maharashtra and Bihar, which together account for 168 seats, is critical for the party to cross the 200-seat mark, and in its bid to reach the magic halfway mark of 272.

With all of its 28 seats going to polls, the southern state of Karnataka is a key battleground. Congress had defeated BJP in last year's state legislature polls, bringing to an end the saffron party's only power centre in southern India.

In the previous national polls held five years ago, BJP had won 18 seats and the party is expected to struggle to do well in Karnataka whose capital city Bangalore is watching one of the keenly contested seats in the state where Congress party candidate Nandan Nilekani is pitted against BJP veteran Ananth Kumar and the Aam Aadmi Party's (AAP) Nina Nayak as candidates.

Nilekani is the billionaire co-founder and former CEO of Infosys, one of India's largest IT services firms, while Kumar is a former federal minister.

Voting was held in four of the 39 parliamentary seats in West Bengal and

all the four seats are in northern part of the state. Opinion polls show the state's ruling Trinamool Congress headed by Mamata Banerjee to do very well.

Mamata is hoping for a performance that could position her party as the third largest after two main national parties BJP and Congress so that she can have a major say in government-formation in the event of a fractured mandate.

Yesterday's polling also covered 11 parliamentary seats in Uttar Pradesh, which has a total of 80 seats, the largest among the states, for which Congress, BJP, Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party are in a fight.

Voting was also held today in 19 of the 48 seats in western state of Maharashtra ruled by Congress and its ally Nationalist Congress Party since 1999. In the previous national polls in the state, Congress-NCP alliance had secured 25 seats while BJP-Shiv Sena seven.

Seven of the 40 seats in Bihar state also went to poll yesterday amidst projections of a close triangular contest between BJP, Janata Dal (U) led by chief minister Nitish Kumar and Lalu Prasad-headed Rashtriya Janata Dal.

In the desert state of Rajasthan, 20 of the 25 seats went to poll. In the last parliamentary polls, Congress had won 20 seats but the party was voted out of power in the state in state legislature polls in December last year and BJP is expected to do well in this

4 death convicts acquitted by HC

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three Shibir men, who were given life term by the Chittagong court, meaning their sentences will remain in force, Deputy Attorney General Moniruzzaman Rubel told The Daily Star.

The government will appeal to the Supreme Court, challenging the HC verdict, he said.

According to the case statement, armed cadres of Shibir, student wing of the Jamaat-e-Islami,

sprayed bullets on a microbus carrying activists of Chhatra League, pro-Awami League student body.

The six BCL activists, killed in the attack, were Hasibur Rahman Helal, Jahangir Hossain, Rafiqul Islam Sohag, Kashem, Jahangir Alam and Azizul Islam. The two other victims were microbus driver Monu Mia and auto-rickshaw driver Zahed Hossain.

The four acquitted Shibir men --

Sajjad Hossain Khan, Alamgir Kabir Manik, Azam and Md Solaiman -- are now in jail.

On March 27, 2008, Second Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge Ekramul Haq Chowdhury handed down the capital punishment and life term to the Shibir men.

The three who got life term are Habib Khan, Md Abdul Kaiyum Chowdhury Rimon alias Imon, and Enamul Haq. They are on the run.

Top pathologist hired by Pistorius won't testify

AFP, Pretoria

A star pathologist hired by Oscar Pistorius yesterday told AFP he will not testify at the athlete's murder trial, another blow for his defence after a week of savage cross-examination.

Private forensic pathologist Reggie Perumal -- who joined Pistorius's hand-picked team soon after Reeva Steenkamp was killed on Valentine's Day morning 2013 -- will not take the stand, amid suggestions his post-mortem findings support key parts of the prosecution's case.

Perumal has appeared in many high-profile cases in South Africa, where a private pathologist can cost upwards of \$2,000 a day.

He was hired by Pistorius in time to attend the model's autopsy.

When asked if he would testify, the Durban-based pathologist told AFP "no, ma'am."

"I think you're aware that I can't say anything right now."

Perumal's absence from the witness box casts further doubt on the believability of Pistorius's story, after a week which saw the Paralympic star and one

of his hired experts torn to shreds by prosecutor Gerrie Nel.

Nel drew a number of concessions during his cross-examination of Pistorius, who was at times argumentative, evasive and emotional on the witness stand.

On Thursday Nel hammered defence expert Roger Dixon, a forensic geologist who testified on key elements of the Pistorius crime scene, including the order of the bullets that hit Steenkamp.

Nel, a legal veteran known as the "Pit Bull", derided the quality of the expert's testimony, accusing him of "misleading" the court.

"I am not trying to mislead the court," said Dixon.

Perumal's unusual decision not to testify has attracted the attention of his fellow forensic pathologists.

"I have heard that it might be because he refused to amend his version," said Steve Naidoo, a Durban-based private forensic pathologist. "If so, and if Dr Perumal is not willing to twist the truth, then it's to his tremendous credit."

20 injured in clash

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"We brought the situation under control by charging batons and firing rubber bullets and teargas shells at the students," said Abu Raihan Md Saleh, deputy commissioner (north) of Barisal Metropolitan Police.

Traffic movement on the highway, which connects nine inter-district routes, including Barisal-Bhola-Patuakhali, resumed at 12:30 pm, he added.

Two law enforcers, Constable Siddikur Rahman and Havildar Asadul Huq, were injured in the clash.

Campus sources said students put up the roadblock after Naimuddin Mistu, a student of the university's law department, was assaulted by a bus helper and conductor yesterday morning.

Mistu came under attack after he had protested at not being given a chance to disembark from the bus in front of the campus gate at Karnakathi.

Students alleged that bus conductors never allow them concessions in fare. They also do not give students opportunities to disembark from buses at the campus gate.

Of the 20 injured, 14 students were admitted at Barisal Sher-e-Bangla Medical College and Hospital. The rest were given primary treatment at the hospital.

Meanwhile, police, the university authorities and road transport owners and workers' association held a tripartite meeting at the office of the Barisal Metropolitan Police (BMP) yesterday evening.

Emerging from the meeting, BMP commissioner Md Shamsuddin told reporters that a bus stoppage would be made in front of the campus gate and students would get concessions in bus fare.

Later, he visited the injured students at the hospital.