

AL won't contest N'ganj by-polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League last night decided not to nominate any candidate for the by-polls to the Narayanganj-5 parliamentary constituency to be held on June 26.

Instead, it will extend support to the Jatiya Party candidate in the constituency that fell vacant after the death of JP lawmaker Nasim Osman on April 30.

The decisions were made at a meeting of the party's parliamentary board chaired by AL President and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at Gono Bhaban.

Nasim, presidium member of the main opposition Jatiya Party, was elected uncontested in the January 5 general election.

The JP may nominate Nasim's widow Parvin Osman to run for the by-election.

Sources said former convener of Narayanganj district unit AL SM Akram may also contest the by-polls with the support of local AL men.

The present political situation and sensational abductions and killings of seven people in Narayanganj came up at the discussion, according to sources.

Fakhrul, Moudud

FROM PAGE 1

Police filed the case against the 29 BNP men and 1,200 unknown persons accusing them of obstructing law enforcers from discharging their duties, attempting to kill them and hurling crude bombs to create panic in Shantinagar and Malibagh areas of the capital on March 2, 2013 during the BNP-led opposition's street agitation programme. The case was lodged the same day.

DB Inspector Fazlur Rahman, also the investigating officer (IO) of the case, claimed that he found "evidences of the charges" against the accused.

Goyeshwar Chandra Roy, Abdullah Al Noman, Barakatullah Bulu, Amanullah Aman, Shahid Uddin Chowdhury Annee and Moazzem Hossain Alal are among the other accused.

Of the accused, 21 BNP leaders and activists including Moudud, Fakhrul earlier secured bail for different terms from different courts in this case.

The IO prayed to the court for issuing arrest warrant for the other eight accused that are currently in hiding.

Many senior BNP leaders have been indicted in some other cases of arson, blasts, vandalism and attempting to kill law enforcers.

Police filed those cases against the BNP leaders during the opposition's movement last year and their earlier agitations for a caretaker government to oversee the 10th parliamentary elections.

Sundarbans

FROM PAGE 20

Division, said the cause of the fire could not be known.

Requesting anonymity, a forest official said the fire might have originated from a cigarette butt.

Meanwhile, a three-member probe committee, headed by Abul Kalam Azad, assistant conservator of Chandpai range, was formed yesterday to find the cause of the fire and to estimate the damage.

It has been asked to submit report to Amir Hossain within three working days.

According to some probe reports on previous fire incidents, fires broke out in the low-lying areas of the southern and northern parts of Sharankhola and Chandpai ranges because of heat wave and strong winds towards the end of spring and beginning of summer every year.

Syria breaks rebel siege on Aleppo central prison

AFP, Beirut

Syria's army has ended a year-long rebel siege of Aleppo central prison after a fiercely fought battle for the strategic prize, a monitoring group said yesterday.

"After a siege of nearly 13 months by Al-Nusra Front and Islamist rebels, regular armed forces backed by pro-regime fighters were able to break the siege of Aleppo central prison," the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

Tanks and armoured vehicles entered the prison grounds and intense celebratory gunfire was heard inside the sprawling complex, Observatory director Rami Abdul Rahman told AFP.

The army's advance in the area around the prison in northern Aleppo had "cut a path for essential supplies to rebel fighters between areas they control and the Turkish border," Abdul Rahman said.

INVITING MODI

PM likely to send envoy next month

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister Mahmood Ali or prime minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi is likely to go to India soon to formally invite Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Bangladesh.

Sheikh Hasina is expected to send her special envoy carrying a letter in the first week of next month, after she returns from a four-day visit to Japan from May 25, diplomatic sources said.

The PM will also visit China from June 6 to 11.

Dhaka has already given New Delhi an impression that it will be ready to host the new Indian PM anytime this year, the sources said, seeking ano-

nymity.

Hasina in a letter to Modi already said, "I hope that you would find my country your second home and first destination for your official visit abroad."

Sources said Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, who has been nominated to represent Hasina at Modi's oath-taking ceremony on May 26, was expected to meet senior BJP leaders to discuss Modi's visit and other bilateral issues.

Meanwhile, Indian President Pranab Mukherjee on May 11 invited his Bangladesh counterpart Abdul Hamid to visit India. Hamid accepted the invitation and thanked Pranab for inviting him, sources said.

NSA BULK DATA COLLECTION US House passes landmark reforms

AFP, Washington

The US House of Representatives yesterday passed landmark reforms curbing bulk collection of Americans' telephone records, the first step toward restricting intelligence-gathering by the National Security Agency since Edward Snowden divulged the secret program last year.

But the reforms, backed by the White House, lost the support of

civil liberties groups and tech companies like Google and Microsoft, after the Obama administration demanded changes that critics say watered down strict limits on collection of phone records and other personal data.

Despite an eruption of controversy in the run-up to the vote, Republicans and Democrats largely got behind the reforms, approving the legislation 303-121.

Khaleda for probe

FROM PAGE 1

Mentioning that armed forces officers had been leading the Rab, she said, "Therefore, the controversy over Rab activities is putting the image of the country's armed forces at stake".

Khaleda claimed her government had formed the Rab to combat militancy and serious crimes. "But it is now being used to terrify people and suppress opposition movements."

The government was using the elite force to oppress the opposition, she alleged.

She demanded that all leaders and activists of the BNP, who were picked up allegedly by law enforcers, be returned alive.

The BNP chief also urged the government to ensure that no arrest was made by personnel in plainclothes and any arrest should be made in the presence of a witness and, if possible, a magistrate.

Referring to the gruesome killing of Phulgazi upazila chairman Ekramul Haque, Khaleda said media reports and the victim's family suggest that it is the people of Awami League who killed him. However, members of the same party now are creating chaos in Feni following the murder.

However, she did not say anything about the police obstruction on holding the programme at the IEB.

Families of seven BNP men, who have been allegedly picked up by law enforcers and have remained missing ever since, met the BNP chairperson at the programme. Leading citizens, including Professor Piash Karim and Dilara Chowdhury, also spoke at the discussion.

The programme was scheduled to start at 3:00pm at the IEB. However, a

police team headed by Sirajul Islam, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station, went to the IEB around 11:00am and asked the BNP leaders and activists, who were preparing the venue, to leave.

At one stage, the IEB authorities were forced to lock the main entrance of the auditorium at around 11:30am.

Shibli Noman, assistant commissioner (Ramna zone) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, who was there, said the BNP was barred from holding the programme as it did not have permission.

BNP leaders Barkat Ullah Bulu, Shahiduddin Chowdhury Anee and Abul Khair Bhuiyan then went to the DMP commissioner around 2:20pm to seek permission but, according to sources, could not meet him.

According to the BNP chairperson's adviser Jainul Abedin, the party had applied to the DMP on Wednesday morning for the permission but did not receive any response.

BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir with others left the IEB area around 3:45pm, fearing arrest when police brought a prison van at the venue.

Fakhrul alleged that the law enforcers "illegally and undemocratically" foiled the programme.

"The government's undemocratic attitude has been exposed through this," said the BNP spokesperson.

Eminent lawyer barrister Rafiqul Haque came to the IEB to attend the programme around 3:40pm only to find the venue under lock and key.

Criticising this, he said the government should not display such behaviour as it violates the fundamental rights of the people.

Gulf regimes aid Sisi to ensure own security

AFP, Dubai

Leading Gulf monarchies are staunchly backing Abdel Fatah al-Sisi, Egypt's presidential frontrunner, in the hope that their generous financial help will bolster his campaign to crush the Muslim Brotherhood and indirectly secure their own regimes.

"An absence of stability in Egypt means instability in the Gulf," says Emirati political science professor Abdulkhaled Abdulla.

Sisi "represents Egypt's only national institution that is capable of restoring stability" in his country, situated across the Red Sea from Saudi Arabia, he explains.

Since the Sisi-led military ousted Islamist president Mohamed Morsi last July, the new authorities banned his Muslim Brotherhood, arrested its leaders and cracked down on its followers in a campaign that has killed more than 1,400 people.

On May 5, Sisi said the Brotherhood, also banned in many Gulf countries and designated as a "terrorist organisation" by Saudi Arabia, was "finished" in Egypt and would not return if he is elected.

Those were encouraging words for the absolute monarchs in the Gulf, who relations with Egypt deteriorated

dramatically during the rule of Morsi, elected following an Arab Spring-inspired uprising that long-time Saudi ally Hosni Mubarak.

As the Brotherhood gained prominence in several Arab Spring countries, Saudi Arabia watched cautiously, while the UAE launched an unprecedented crackdown down on Islamist activists on its soil.

In January, it jailed a group of 30 Emiratis and Egyptians for terms of three months to five years for forming a Muslim Brotherhood cell.

At the same time, disagreement over the Brotherhood has soured relations with fellow Gulf Cooperation Council member Qatar, the only Gulf country to back Morsi.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain all withdrew their ambassadors from Doha in March. Saudi Arabia and the UAE accused gas-rich Qatar of offering refuge to Muslim Brotherhood figures, among them dissidents from their countries.

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