

BCL rally

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Thousands of activists from in and outside the capital joined the rally, the second such programme in a row. Dhaka city Awami League organised a gathering on the same occasion at the same venue, creating traffic chaos on Saturday.

Businessmen and office-goers, who regularly use the route, bore the brunt of the situation.

Shafiqul Islam, a lawyer at Dhaka judge court, spent more than three hours on his way to Farmgate whereas his regular journey from the court in the old part of the city takes around 45 minutes.

"We do not oppose political gatherings but we don't want such programmes to be held at the cost of people's daily lives," he said.

Whenever any political party holds any programme, the authorities close down roads, ignoring the sufferings of commuters, said Altab Hossain, a street vendor at Shahbagh intersection. "Even if they [the authorities] don't close the roads, huge gathering of people and vehicles create traffic congestion. I have been witnessing this trend since I started my business here seven to eight years back," he said.

A Daily Star correspondent saw an Ansar member and a police constable barring vehicles at Katabon intersection from moving further.

They were not even letting people in cars or other vehicles go back home at Paribagh or Shahbagh.

"We have nothing to do. It's Awami League's hartal [what he meant was programme]," said the Ansar member.

The traffic situation worsened further in the evening when the PM left the venue after addressing the rally.

Hundreds of people were seen waiting at Shahbagh and Farmgate, two major points of the city, for public transport. As soon as a bus approached, they were jostling each other to get on the vehicle.

Women passengers faced extreme difficulties at the time.

"What to say...who will hear...will it make any difference," a woman screeched at Sonargaon intersection and then fell silent.

People blamed hiring of buses by rally-goers as one of the reasons for the scarcity of vehicles.

ATM Masud, a private service holder from Badda, regularly travels by buses of Winner Paribahan from Russel Square to his residence.

Finding no vehicles at Russel Square, he walked to Farmgate to get a bus.

"It's been around an hour I am waiting [at Farmgate] for a bus that goes to Gulshan... I have to take another transport from Gulshan to Badda, and I don't know what the situation is in Gulshan."

36th founding

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since the restoration of democracy in 1991 that BNP is observing its founding anniversary when it is neither in power nor in parliament.

BNP chief Khaleda Zia and acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir have given separate messages on the occasion.

In her message, Khaleda said law and order situation in the country was at its worst. She called upon people to prepare for a movement against Sheikh Hasina's government.

Khaleda along with her party leaders and activists would place wreaths and offer fateha at the grave of late president Ziaur Rahman this morning, BNP sources said.

The party has organised a discussion meeting in the afternoon at the diploma engineers' institute.

The BNP associate organisations have also taken up various programmes to observe the day.

The BNP-led alliance and some other political parties in the country boycotted the January 5 election as it was held under the Sheikh Hasina government. They wanted it to be held under a non-party caretaker government.

The party now faces various challenges, including overhaul of its different associate bodies and gaining strength, to wage an anti-government movement to realise their demand for restoration of the caretaker government system, BNP insiders said.

Police say

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Shibli Noman, DMP assistant commissioner (Ramna zone) and Shahbagh Police Station OC Sirajul Islam.

Contacted, Samina told The Daily Star, "At least we have been able to make them accountable [for the incident]. Police usually don't have any sense of accountability."

Myanmar pledges

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Myanmarese nationals who are living in different parts of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar after intruding illegally.

"We've discussed all the issues very frankly. It's clear that Myanmar wants to take the relations with Bangladesh to a newer height," the foreign secretary said while briefing reporters after the FOC.

Terming the meeting fruitful, he said there has been a "qualitative difference" between the 7th and 8th rounds of FOC. "The Myanmar side has expressed their commitment to start repatriation."

The foreign secretary said the two countries will soon form a working group which will review the list of 2,415 people as verified in 2005. Those born later could be added to the list.

"We'll make preparations within the next two months to look into how quickly the repatriation can be started. We're very happy to see the outcome."

The two sides had nearly a four-hour meeting from 10:00am. Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and Myanmar Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs Thant Kyaw led their respective sides.

OF CONVICTED PEOPLE

Both sides have agreed to quicken the repatriation of Bangladesh and Myanmar nationals, mostly fishermen, who are in jails of the two countries being convicted of minor crimes.

According to official estimates, some 200 Bangladeshi nationals are in Myanmar jails and around 110 Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh jails.

"Ambassadors of the two countries have been given the responsibility to devise a system and quicken the repatriation," said the foreign secretary.

BANGLADESH'S PROPOSAL
Bangladesh proposed to form a joint committee to exclusively deal with the issues of repatriation of refugees and undocumented Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh.

It was decided that the first-round meeting of the joint commission at the level of foreign minister will be held in Dhaka early next year.

Dhaka felt that all the aspects of Bangladesh-Myanmar bilateral relations should be brought under an umbrella framework, the secretary said. So, it proposed signing of a "Framework Arrangement on Trust

and Cooperation for Development between Bangladesh and Myanmar."

It contains eight components -- strengthening the trust or enhancing the trust, security and cooperation dialogue, trade and connectivity, energy, environment and natural disaster, agricultural and rural development, education, health and culture, and sub-regional cooperation and collaboration in the Bay.

"We've handed over the draft proposal of the agreement to the Myanmar side to have a broader framework and a common platform as we want to look into all aspects of relationships," the secretary said, adding that it was prepared in the light of Bangladesh's experience with India and the US.

The visiting delegation highly appreciated it and said that it will be reviewed at the joint commission meeting next year when the foreign minister of Myanmar will visit Dhaka.

On better border management issue, the foreign secretary said there has been regular contact with the border forces of the two countries and both sides will start discussion to have home secretary-level meeting in addition to FOC.

Both sides also agreed to strengthen efforts to control drug and human trafficking. The foreign secretary said they discussed issues related to energy cooperation, especially on gas.

On road connectivity, he said the discussion has begun again after 2008 and both the sides are thinking of alternative routes in addition to those already proposed.

Myanmar said it wants to send two teams to Bangladesh to learn from Bangladesh's success in agriculture and livestock sectors.

OTHER DEALS

During the joint commission meeting, pending agreement on Promotion and Protection of Reciprocal Investment and treaty on the demarcation of land boundary to the north of Naaf River are expected to be signed and ratified.

The land boundary treaty signed in 1998 was yet to be ratified, said the foreign secretary, adding that a protocol on the issue was originally signed in 1966.

Both the countries also agreed to renew for another five years the Agreement on Cultural Cooperation, which has already expired.

Charges

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investigation officer, submitted two charge sheets to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of Dhaka, showing 25 people as prosecution witnesses, court sources revealed yesterday.

Of the two charge sheets, one was submitted for hurling crude bombs at policemen and the other was filed for assaulting them and creating panic among people near the BNP office last year.

The charge sheets were submitted only to keep the BNP-led alliance leader "busy and out of anti-government movement", Moslehuddin Jasim, a pro-BNP lawyer, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The IO also pleaded to drop names of 24 others as accused in the case and the court fixed September 30 to decide on the matter, added the court sources.

Police had filed two cases, accusing the same 154 BNP-led alliance men in each of those, following a raid at the BNP office on March 11 last year.

On August 25, 147 of the BNP-led alliance leaders and activists were indicted in the other case filed for vandalising and torching vehicles near the BNP office in the March 11 incident.

During the police raid, 157 leaders and activists of the BNP-led alliance including Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Sadeque Hossain Khoka were detained.

The police made the move hours after several cocktails were blasted at an opposition rally in front of the BNP office on that day.

Fakhrul and Khoka were released just a day after being detained.

JP may quit

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would quit the cabinet, said the sources.

When several JP lawmakers said the party should quit the cabinet, JP Chairman Hussein Muhammad Ershad and Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad agreed with them, according to party insiders present at the meeting at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban.

The insiders said the party wouldn't disclose anything until it finalises the matter.

Raushan raised the issue at the meeting, saying if the JP quits the government, it can play an effective role as opposition in the House. She said people don't consider the party a real opposition for its "dual role", said the insiders.

Ershad backed his wife's idea, and said once his party's ministers quit the cabinet, he will step down as special envoy to the prime minister, they said.

The Daily Star contacted a couple of party lawmakers who confirmed the fact but didn't agree to go on record.

However, JP Secretary General Ziauddin Ahmed Bablu told this correspondent that there were no discussions on the issue at yesterday's meeting.

The JP has 40 lawmakers in the 10th parliament, and one minister and two state ministers in the cabinet. They are Water Resources Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud, State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Moshir Rahman Ranga and State Minister for Labour and Employment Mujibul Haque Chunnun.

At yesterday's meeting, Anisul and Ranga said the party shouldn't disclose the matter to the media before it is made final.

The two ministers said they will resign once the party decides on it. But if the matter is made public now, it will undermine their positions as ministers.

The party also decided that it would oppose the bills on the national broadcast policy and the constitutional amendment that would give back parliament the powers to impeach Supreme Court judges.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Opposition Chief Whip Tajul Islam Chowdhury said his party's lawmakers would protest the government's move on the two issues.

Meeting sources said the party decided to raise its voice in the House about important issues such as price hike of essentials and law and order.

Robbers kill

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from the trawlers and kidnapped 50 fishermen.

The gang would demand ransom from the trawler owners to free the fishermen, Ansar added.

Jahangir Majhee, driver of fishing trawler FB Bismillah, said I somehow managed to escape the robbers' attack and came back to Alipur.

"We couldn't identify the gang," he said.

Floods affect over 20 lakh

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director (relief) of the DDM.

Persistent floods and the resultant erosion have washed away homesteads, roads, schools and thousands of hectares of croplands.

But an estimate of the damage was yet to be made, he said.

Correspondents from Chandpur, Munshiganj, Gaibandha, Mymensingh, Madaripur, Bogra and Sirajganj districts yesterday reported that river erosion was worsening in the areas.

Around 350 families in Kurigram became homeless due to erosion by the Teesta, taking the number of victim families to 3,732 in the district.

Md Abdul Gafur, chairman of Jatrapur union in Chilmari upazila, said, "The intensity of erosion increases once the floodwater starts receding. So, the erosion here might get worse within a few days, I fear."

In Bogra, 30 more villages went under water yesterday, raising the number of flood affected villages to 200 in the district since an embankment in Sariakandi had collapsed three days ago.

Some 37 villages were affected in Sherpur due to rise of the Brahmaputra river, reports our correspondent.

A portion of the Chandpur town protection embankment faces the risk of collapsing as several holes appeared in the embankment and concrete blocks had been sinking since Saturday night, said Maziful Islam, an official of the Bangladesh Water Development Board in Chandpur.

BNP: a party

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being president. That was a bizarre means of exercising authority, which was later followed by Gen HM Ershad to grab state power.

The process that Zia began through a controversial referendum known as "Yes"/"No" vote in 1977 to ascertain people's confidence in him and his policies ended with the BNP's formation within a year.

The way the BNP was formed and Zia was given absolute power over the party exposed the character of the military ruler, who took over less than two years after the brutal assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the overthrow of his government on August 15, 1975.

Under Zia's instructions, the Jatiya Ganatantrik Dal [Nationalist Democratic Party] was floated in February 1978, enticing leaders from different political parties.

Justice Abdus Sattar was chosen its convenor when he was the country's vice president, an office he reportedly came by as a reward for siding with Zia in the latter's move to take over the office of CMLA and the presidency from Justice Sayem.

Later, he formed the Jatiyatabadi Front [Nationalist Front], persuading politicians from different parties to join him, and contested the presidential election as a candidate of the front in June 1978. At the election, General M.A.G. Osmany, C-in-C of the Bangladesh Forces during the War of Liberation, was Zia's rival.

Only a couple of months after his electoral victory, Gen Zia dissolved the front and the Jatiya Ganatantrik Dal in September, and floated a new party, the Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Dal -- BNP.

The BNP charter gave him absolute power to control and run the party.

Asked about the possible reasons behind the move, a senior BNP leader yesterday told The Daily Star that Gen Zia had a feeling of insecurity about whether he would have any control over the party after leaving the offices of army chief and CMLA.

"Therefore, the party charter gave him absolute authority, assuring him of his position in the BNP," the BNP leader said on condition of anonymity.

At the 1979 parliamentary elections, the BNP led by Zia won a two-thirds majority. The parliament controlled by the BNP passed the Fifth Amendment to the constitution by indemnifying the illegal takeover of state power by Zia and his predecessors Moshataque and Sayem and all activities of the trio during the period of the martial law regime.

The BNP charter has remained almost the same over the past 36 years, allowing Zia's widow Khaleda Zia, who has been leading the party for three decades, to emerge as the party's supreme leader.

At least the holding of elections to the party committees at all levels gave party men the scope for practising democracy within. Those included the national executive and standing committees.

The BNP had to introduce this provision by curtailing some powers of the chief to get registered with the Election Commission as a parliamentary party in 2008.

But the party leaders proved their sycophancy at the 2009 national council by empowering Khaleda to pick

The local administration has asked shop owners near the embankment to move away and police have been deployed in the area to keep the curious mob at bay.

A vast area of Munshiganj district was inundated yesterday as the Padma kept rising. Disruption of the ferry services on Mawa-Kawrakandi route continued due to strong current of the river, creating tailbacks on both ends.

With the floodwaters receding, waterborne diseases were spreading in different areas of Jamalpur.

Fifty-three people were admitted to different hospitals with diarrhoea in seven upazilas, 13 with respiratory tract infection, 11 with eye infection and 37 with skin diseases, according to the Jamalpur civil surgeon's office.

Civil Surgeon Dr Hafizur Rahman said, "Waterborne diseases have not broken out in an epidemic form yet. However, our medical team is ready to deal with any emergency."

Meanwhile, the FFWC yesterday forecast that the flood situation in the capital and some other districts, including Shariatpur, Madaripur, Munshiganj, Manikganj, Rajbari and Faridpur, may continue to deteriorate.

Except for the Padma, all major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, the Jamuna, the Ganges and the Meghna, may continue to subside, said Sazzad Hossain, deputy director of the FFWC.

The water level of the Jamuna (Brahmaputra in India) has gone down in India, which confirms an improvement of the flood situation in Bangladesh, said an FFWC official.

individuals of her choice for the posts.

The BNP has been more fortunate than all other political parties in the country. It assumed power five times and stayed in power for around 15 years out of its 36 years in existence.

Its archival Awami League, which led the country's Liberation War, assumed power four times and has been in power for around 14 years out of its 66 years as a political party.

The BNP, for the first time since the restoration of parliamentary democracy in 1991, is now celebrating its founding anniversary when it is neither in power nor in parliament as the opposition. Its refusal to participate in the January 5 elections under the Sheikh Hasina government left the party out of parliament.

On this occasion, the situation was different for the party than on previous ones.

The BNP led by Khaleda Zia earlier refused to participate in the 1986 parliamentary election under Gen Ershad's martial law regime, though other parties, including the AL, joined the polls.

Along with other major parties, the BNP again boycotted the 1988 elections. The party cashed in on the popularity it gained through the election boycott, and won the 1991 parliamentary election under Khaleda's leadership.

In contrast, the January 5 election boycott had appeared as a nightmare for the party. It failed to resist the polls. Even after the polls, the party could not stage a strong agitation to force the government to negotiate with the opposition.

In the view of many political analysts, the party's movement for a reintroduction of the election time non-partisan caretaker government in 2012 and 2013 failed to generate public support because of the widespread violence that marked the party's performance.

The party's senior leaders are to pay dearly now for the violence as almost all of them are facing criminal cases in connection with the pre-polls violence.

Over the years, the BNP has not called its national and grassroots-level sessions on a regular basis, thereby deterring the growth of new leadership.

Its failure to hold meetings of different party forums, promote debate and discussions on policy-making in line with democratic norms has also been a stumbling block.

The party has faced turbulent situations in the past. And amid such a situation, Khaleda, who had no experience in politics, was made vice-chairman of the party in March 1983 and was elected chairperson in May 1984.

The party's present state is also blamed on unbridled corruption and misuse of power by many of its leaders during the BNP-led government's tenure between 2001 and 2006. For this, it paid heavily at the December 2008 general elections in which it faced a humiliating defeat at the hands of the AL.

Yet, the BNP dreams of returning to power at the next general election, regardless of its organisational weaknesses and some major scandals when it was in power. This is also because of the lack of a credible and strong alternative to the BNP and the AL as well.