

It's time to take to the streets

14-party thinks violence cannot be contained only by administrative steps

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling Awami League-led 14-party alliance has decided to take to the streets to resist the ongoing violence unleashed by the BNP-led alliance as it thinks the violence cannot be contained only through "administrative way".

Earlier, however, some AL leaders and ministers, including Food Minister Qamrul Islam, AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, Advisory Council Member Suranjit Sengupta and Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed had predicted that the violence would end in seven to 10 days. The time frame, however, has expired.

The decisions came at a meeting of the combine at the AL chief's Dhanmondi office.

Chaired by Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal leader Sharif Nurul Ambia, the meeting discussed the latest political situation, and decided to take up a series of

programmes across the country to protest the violence that claimed the lives of at least 51 people, burnt and injured dozen others since January 6, sources in the meeting told The Daily Star.

Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua told the meeting that the violence unleashed by the BNP-led alliance might continue. He also urged the 14-party leaders to take to the streets to resist the anarchy, insiders said.

Health Minister Mohammad Nasim also expressed similar views at the meeting.

After the meeting, Mohammad Nasim, also the spokesperson for the combine, announced next programmes and urged the law enforcers to exercise maximum power for restoring peace.

The 14-party will hold a peace rally on February 7 in Chaudhagram of Comilla, where at least eight people were killed in an arson attack on early Tuesday.

Tigers versus

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without opener Tamim Iqbal, who is yet to reach his required fitness level following an injury on his left knee.

The team management may also rest captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and pacer Taskin Ahmed, both of who reportedly complained of niggles. While the team physio confirmed that the problems were not severe, the players may be rested today on a precautionary note.

The second warm-up match has received wide-scale publicity particu-

larly due to the inclusion of Australian captain Clarke, who has to prove that he is completely relieved off his hamstring and back issues prior to Australia's World Cup game against the Tigers on February 21.

While Clarke trained at the Allan Border Ground yesterday, the Tigers took a day off. Pacer Al-Amin Hossain, who did not feature in Bangladesh's first warm-up, is likely to get a chance in today's game.

Country hamstrung

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The BNP-led combine has been claiming that the agitation is aimed at restoring people's democratic rights by toppling the present government formed through the one-sided January 5 national election a year ago.

The AL-led government opted to foil the agitation through administrative measures instead of looking for a political solution. But it has failed.

Opposition activists are rarely seen on streets to enforce the blockade and hartals. But they allegedly keep throwing petrol bombs at public transports, leaving people in a state of panic.

The use of excessive force and violent means has worsened the crisis, and people and businesses have been made to pay dearly.

Strengthened by shutdowns, the countrywide blockade has severely hampered people's movement, leaving them in a state of uncertainty.

Educational institutions are forced to remain closed for an indefinite period, jeopardising academic schedules at schools, colleges and universities.

All sectors, including garment, agriculture, real estate and wholesale and retail trade, suffer the brunt of the ongoing crisis.

WHAT ANALYSTS SAY

M Hafizuddin Khan, former adviser to a caretaker government, thinks the prevailing crisis should be resolved politically.

"Neither the government nor the BNP will get the desired results by using force or violent means," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"It is a vicious circle. Violence breeds more violence. And to check escalation of violence, the government will need to use more force. But it will fuel further violence," he added.

Echoing his view, Prof Nizam Ahmed, a teacher at Chittagong University, said the solution to the current crisis lies in political means.

It is necessary to get to the bottom of the crisis and then address it to take the country out of this turmoil, said Prof Nizam, a researcher on the country's political culture and parliamentary affairs.

The present political impasse is rooted in the cancellation of the non-partisan caretaker government by the AL-led government in June 2011.

The matter couldn't be solved even in around three years due to the two sides' rigid stances on the caretaker government issue. The failure led to the holding of the one-sided parliamentary election on January 5 last year.

The crisis resurfaced prior to the first anniversary of the one-sided national polls.

The BNP sought the government's permission to hold a rally on January 5 to observe the day as "democracy killing day".

But the government denied the BNP permission. It had confined Khaleda to her Gulshan office for two weeks since January 3, and locked the party's Nayapaltan office.

On January 5 evening, an infuriated Khaleda announced a non-stop nationwide blockade.

TIMELINE	
JANUARY 12	DMP withdraws ban on rallies enabling AL to hold rally in Dhaka
	BNP joint secretary general Shajahan, assistant office secretary Shamimur arrested
JANUARY 13	Gun attack on Khaleda's adviser Reaz Rahman in Gulshan-2
JANUARY 14	Five burnt to death in Rangpur in an arson attack on a bus
JANUARY 15	20-party countrywide daylong hartal protesting attack on Reaz
JANUARY 16	Muhith claims the volatile situation would be normal within 7 days
JANUARY 18	police barricade, additional policemen removed from Khaleda's office
JANUARY 19	Khaleda opts to stay in her office
JANUARY 20	Hasina said Khaleda would be tried
JANUARY 24	Khaleda's younger son Arafat Rahman Koko dies in Kuala Lumpur
	Hasina tries to visit Khaleda to console her but fails due to closed gate
	Khaleda expressed gratitude for Hasina's visit
	Khaleda's name mentioned in the Jatrabari arson attack case
JANUARY 25	Senior BNP leaders admit Hasina did not get due respect when she visited Khaleda's office
JANUARY 27	Fakhrul placed on remand for the first time
JANUARY 28	Hasina instructs top police officials to do whatever needed to stop the violence
JANUARY 31	Power line to Khaleda's office cut and restored after 19 hours
	Cable, internet, mobile and land phone connections to Khaleda's office severed
FEBRUARY 1	20-party's 72-hour hartal starts
	Khaleda's adviser Mosaddak Ali Fala arrested
FEBRUARY 2	Police impose restrictions on visiting Khaleda
FEBRUARY 3	Khaleda's office wore a deserted look
	Seven burnt alive in a petrol bomb attack on a bus in Comilla
	Hartal extended until 6:00pm Thursday.



FUNNY

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Instead of sticking a customary sticker saying "press" on the motorbike, the journalist who owns this bike put one saying "fresh". One can only hope he is new to journalism. The photo was taken in front of the BNP chief's office in Gulshan.





READER'S eye

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No need for state of emergency: PM

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Khaleda was asked to hold the rally anywhere except Dhaka.

"But she [Khaleda] did not do that, she came out from her home and started living in her office with an intention to create anarchy in the country," she said, adding, "What is her [Khaleda's] desire?"

Answering another question from the opposition, Hasina said the government was capable of controlling the situation and the law enforcement agencies were working sincerely to contain the BNP-Jamaat violence.

She termed the troublemakers terrorists with no public support.

Hasina said actions would be taken against those who have been ordering

the killing of people.

"We are finding out the sources of finance and gun powder used in the violence. Directives have been issued to stop the sale of gun powder and retail petrol [excluding to vehicles]," she said.

On opposition chief whip Tajul Islam's demand to stop TV talk shows, where according to him the panelists instigated violence, the prime minister said even though some people always want to create a situation for their personal gains, she could do nothing in this regard.

Describing the recent violence as acts of terrorism by the BNP-led 20-party alliance, several lawmakers demanded stern actions against the troublemakers.

Replying to another question, Hasina said, "Laws are there, I don't think that there is any need to formulate new laws to control the situation."

KHALEDA INSANE

The premier termed the BNP chief insane for continuing with hartals and blockade during the SSC exams. Hasina said exams could have been held during hartals but every life was important to her.

She said deferring the exams would cause problems for the students but at least they would not be at risk.

"Khaleda Zia has become mad. She [Khaleda] has lost sense and won't even hesitate to kill the students," said Hasina.

Parliament session was adjourned until 4:00pm, February 10.

Businesses continue to bleed

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Ports and bridges lost Tk 992.4 crore, ceramics 600 crore, poultry 548.4 crore, plastics 535.5 crore, insurance 450 crore, frozen foods 280 crore, hawks 450 crore, importers 301.5 crore.

As exports and local sales dipped, the jute sector counted a loss of Tk 500 crore. Factories were forced to cut production by up to 30 percent, according to Bangladesh Jute Mills Association.

The loss in the tanneries stands at Tk 459 crore due to damage of the raw hides and skins, failure to meet exports deadline and bring chemicals from ports and additional transport costs, said the Bangladesh Tanners Association.

Stock markets have also been hit,

with the key index on the Dhaka Stock Exchange falling below 4,700-mark for the first time in the last five months. It is because daily turnover dipped to one-month low.

Portfolio investment in the stock market fell 18 percent in January compared to the same month last year as foreign fund managers adopted a "go-slow" strategy.

Small businesses, handlooms and boutiques which are dotted across the country but rely on the capital and other major cities to buy and sell their products have also been counting huge losses.

The country's 25 lakh shops counted Tk 9,000 crore in lost profits, according to Bangladesh Shop Owners Association.

Amid the unabated violence, the

government now plans to revise down its 7.3 percent economic growth target for the current fiscal year.

Officials familiar with the finalisation of this year's revised budget and preparing next year's budget expressed concerns over the growth and revenue mobilisation targets.

Food inflation crept up last month bucking the trend of the past seven months, with the disruption in the supply chain causing prices to go up amid rise of wastage at the farm level as well as transport cost.

Remittance, which plays a key role in reducing the overall incidence of poverty in the country as well as helping it maintain a healthy balance of payment, also went down 2.05 percent year-on-year last month.

2 ex-MPs of BNP detained

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday picked up two former BNP lawmakers near the office of Krishak Sramik Janata League (KSJL) at Motijheel in the capital.

Hazaribagh police detained Jamaat-e-Islami central leader KM Mujibur Rahman and Jubo Dal secretary of Hazaribagh Tali Office unit Mohammad Ujjal reportedly with three crude bombs from Beribadh area around 2:30pm.

BNP sources said the two former MPs -- Ashraf Uddin Nizan and Nazimuddin Ahmed -- were picked up minutes after they stepped out of the KSJL office premises, expressing solidarity with KSJL President Kader Siddique who was staging a sit-in there.

The lawmakers were taken to Detective Branch of police headquarters on Minto Road after they were detained around 1:50pm, Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star.

Kader Siddique has been observing the sit-in in front of his party office from early this week to press for dialogue between Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia to end the current political unrest.

Eleven top leaders of the BNP-led 20-party alliance have been detained since January 5, the day Khaleda announced the ongoing countrywide blockade.

The leaders include Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, Shamsher Mobin Chowdhury, Shamsuzzaman Dudu and Mosaddak Ali Fala.

Meanwhile, no opposition men went to visit Khaleda at her Gulshan office for the third consecutive day yesterday to "avoid being arrested". Khaleda has been there since January 3.

The snapped telephone, cable and internet connections to the office are yet to be restored.

Zubair murder case verdict now on Feb 8

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court has deferred the long-awaited verdict in Jahangirnagar University student Zubair Ahmed murder case until February 8.

The verdict was scheduled to be delivered yesterday.

Judge ABM Nizamul Haque of the Speedy Trial Tribunal-4 set the new date as seven of the accused, now in jail, could not be produced before the court yesterday on security grounds amid the ongoing hartal enforced by the BNP-led alliance.

The court also cancelled bail of the seven out of 13 accused and sent them to jail while the rest were shown fugitives after they escaped from the court dock in February 2014.

They are still at large.

Zubair Ahmed, an honours final year student of English department, was tortured and stabbed allegedly by some activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League, pro-Awami League student body, on January 8, 2012. He died at a Dhaka hospital the next day.