

Dialogue not guaranteed

HT Imam says at BBC Sanglap

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister's Adviser HT Imam yesterday said dialogues with the opposition cannot be guaranteed even if the ongoing blockade is withdrawn.

Violence has to be stopped first and then holding of dialogues might be considered, Imam said at BBC Bangladesh Sanglap in the capital's Biam auditorium.

He was replying to questions from the audience on how long the public would have to be in danger and if there was a way out of this political impasse.

To another query that whether the alleged extrajudicial killings would lead the country towards more conflict, Imam said, "Police action is considered extrajudicial killings only here."

"There's an English expression: homicide by the law and enforcement agency. Such incidents are highest in America and then in Pakistan. Now the question is who we will protect."

Imam quoted the director general of BCB as saying, "Who would we protect if I see a person about to explode a bomb? We will not protect

him but 40 others."

Replying to some people's concern that the country may plunge into a civil war if the political crisis doesn't end, the adviser said the government didn't create this situation.

BNP Chairperson's Adviser Khandker Mahbub Hossain said the situation may further worsen if the government does anything against the will of the masses and using law enforcers.

"It's a political crisis and it has to be resolved politically. Otherwise, there is not only the risk of civil war... our existence might also be threatened."

Mahbub said the Awami League only can call for dialogue as the party is in power.

On the allegation of extrajudicial killings, ActionAid Bangladesh Country Director Farah Kabir said the government must clarify how these incidents were taking place.

Hossain Khaled, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce & Industry (DCCI), said the protest programmes like hartal that hamper businesses shouldn't exist.

2 kids missing as trawler sinks

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Two children went missing when a trawler capsized in the Shitalakkhya river after colliding with another trawler at Bandar upazila in Narayanganj yesterday morning.

At least 10 people were injured in the collision that occurred near Modonganj Koila Ghat around 7:30am, according to Bandar Police Station.

The trawler, which was heading for Meghna ghat, carrying around 50 passengers, sank in the river after it was hit by a cargo trawler, said Nazrul Islam, in-charge of the Navy police outpost.

The missing children are Sumaiya, 8, daughter of Tareq, and Fahim, 4, son of Dulal Miah of Borokanda village in Meghna upazila of Comilla.

All other passengers managed to swim ashore, locals said.

Economy in dire straits

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"We will have to do something for them. The demand for the fund has been raised."

The minister also said the government has not yet assessed the economic loss caused by the month-long blockade and associated arson or petrol bomb attacks.

He also did not make comments about the economic loss estimated by a number of chambers and associations. With productions, incomes and profits affected, the country has lost an estimated \$10 billion in physical damages since the blockade was launched, according to the trade bodies.

Every day, the economy is losing about Tk 2,277.86 crore due to the agitations. The amount would stand at Tk 2,500 crore if the daily loss is calculated taking into account 25 percent of the total industrial production loss, said Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"These are mainly perception-based, not facts-based," said Muhiht,

adding that the government would look into the issue when it reviews the economic situation in March.

Replying to a question, he said it would not be possible to take special step for smooth operation of trucks and covered vans carrying industrial raw materials and goods.

"We are already providing them with extra security."

The veteran ruling party politician vehemently criticised the ongoing blockade and violent activities in the name of political movement.

"It is not a political movement. What is happening now is pure and simple enmity against the country. Obstructing the country's development of the country is the sole goal of Khaleda Zia."

"My regret is that people belonging to the BNP have become part of the criminal activities."

The minister also reacted to BNP Vice-Chairman Hafizuddin Ahmed's demand that the government must step down to pave the way for ending the blockade.

"The thought of resignation of the government is just a sort of balloon without any air."

However, on the current political crisis, he said, "I don't know how it will be solved. The prime minister is looking into it."

The ongoing blockade, the longest in the country's history, has cast a shadow on the government's target to achieve 7.3 percent gross development target in the current fiscal year.

"We were confident even in December that it would not go below 7.2 percent. Now we are highly doubtful whether the growth target would be achieved," the minister said.

He mentioned 2014 was a good year for the country because of the government's macroeconomic management. "I was personally hopeful that 2015 would be wonderful for us," he added.

"Now I can't make any forecast given the deadly activities going on across the country."



FUNNY pics

PHOTO: STEVEN KRUIT



READER'S eye

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starreaderseye@gmail.com. We will share your lighter moments with others.



A whole new meaning of "clean shave". This guy in a barber shop in Barisal isn't satisfied with just shaving the beard and mustache and wants to go all the way. The barber himself seems to be pretty excited about the whole affair brandishing the razor.

Leading citizens to meet Hamid

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"It should be a national dialogue," said Huda.

He observed that national unity like that during the 1971 Liberation War has to be achieved for the sake of the nation, setting aside partisan interest.

Eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said the dialogue would unite all who aspire to see normalcy rather than violence.

Everyone wants peace, not conflicts or politics of confrontation. "We will continue to work on it actively," he said.

Prof Dr Anwar Hossain of history department at the DU said a dialogue between the government and the BNP was quite unlikely. However, a committee comprising civil society members could meet both.

If the two sides don't agree, the committee members could seek three names each from them for an "indirect dialogue" on reforms of the Election Commission as well as on a polls-time government, he said.

In a written speech, Nagorik Oikko Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said the dialogue could be held with

participation of all active political parties and representatives of professional bodies.

He emphasised the need for a permanent solution to the crisis, and said there must be discussions to find ways to strengthen the constitutional bodies and ensure that those function independently.

Legal experts and academics suggested bringing reforms to the Election Commission, the Anti-Corruption Commission and the Public Service Commission.

The country's regulatory framework collapsed, leading to the creation of a cycle of violence, they said.

Badiul Alam Majumder, secretary of Sushashoner Janney Nagorik, said the dialogue must focus on polls-time government and electoral laws.

Asked, BNP Standing Committee member Lt Gen (rtd) Mahbubur Rahman said he would welcome such an initiative from civil society members.

If they can convince the president, he can advise the prime minister to hold a dialogue to end the crisis.

"Constitutionally, the president's power is limited but he still can do a lot from his moral position," he told The Daily Star.

Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif, however, said there was no question of having a dialogue unless the BNP admitted that it was instigating violence across the country.

The others who spoke included former advisers to caretaker governments Akbar Ali Khan, M Hafizuddin Khan, CM Shafi Sami and Rasheda K Chowdhury, jurist Shahdeen Malik, journalist Abu Sayeed Khan, former IGP Nurul Huda, DU teacher Robaet Ferdous, economist Salehuddin Ahmed and Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim.

The BNP-led alliance enforced a non-stop nationwide blockade since January 6 demanding that the government should step down paving the way for an early election.

Since then, at least 65 people have been killed in violence, while businesses continue to suffer heavy losses.



This truck at Mahilara Bus Stand in Gouranadi on Dhaka-Barisal highway hit a tree after alleged blockade supporters hurled a petrol bomb at it early yesterday. Three people inside the cabin were killed.

PHOTO: STAR

More arson, more deaths

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helper Munnu Mia, 45, from Mollabari of Faridpur.

Ripon Mia, owner of the truck, said the truck was heading for Barisal from Bagher Bazaar of Gazipur.

Motaleb boarded the truck heading for Barisal from Bagher Bazaar of

Gazipur to visit another son-in-law's house in Barisal, Ijayedul's brother Sahidul Islam said.

Humayun Kabir, deputy inspector general of police of Barisal Range, said two were detained in connection with the attack.

At Rangpur hospital, 12-year-old Sujan, son of Tara Miah from

Chandipur of Gaibandha's Sundarganj upazila died around 7:30am yesterday. He had been

admitted there with 95 percent burns soon after Friday night's attack, in which a child and three others were instantly burn alive.

Sujan's mother Sonavan Begum, 35, who suffered 80 percent burns,

died around 4:00pm while Saju Mia, 25, of the same village failed in his battle with death around 9:15pm, reports our Rangpur correspondent citing hospital sources.

Having lost his son and wife, Tara Miah himself along with eight-year-old daughter Tanjin also were being treated at the hospital with seven and eight percent burns respectively.

Of the other 16 undergoing treatment there, condition of six were critical, said Maruful Islam, head of Burn and Plastic Surgery unit of the hospital.

The Dhaka-bound bus, carrying around 60 people most of whom were labourers, was in a convoy of 20-25 vehicles under protection of law enforcing agencies, reports our Gaibandha correspondent.

The other deceased were Syed Ali of Kalir Khamar, Halima Bewya and Sumon Mia of Chandipur, and Shilpi Das of Nager Khamar in Sundarganj.

Eleven people were detained in this connection, police said.

In Dhaka, at least six people were injured in two separate crude bomb blasts last evening.

More than three crude bombs went off near Chhobirhaat area on the Dhaka University campus around 7:45pm, injuring at least five people.

Police could not arrest anyone in this connection, although it happened only around 50 yards away from Shahbagh Police Station.

The injured -- Azhar, 20, a second year student of the university's Finance department; Jibon, 25; Rabiul, 30; Awal, 30; and Rintu, 25 -- took treatment at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

In a separate incident, a crude bomb was exploded at Bakshibazar in the capital around 8:00pm, injuring a 12-year-old named Rahat.

A police sergeant was injured in yet another similar blast in the city's

Shyamoli area yesterday morning. Sergeant Golam Maula was treated at Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College Hospital, police said.

Elsewhere, two maize-laden trucks were torched at Moheshpur in Gaibandha's Palashbari, and a bomb was hurled at the office of Awami League lawmaker Abdul Odud in Chapainawabganj. However, none were injured in the incidents.

In Narayanganj, a trucker and his assistant were burnt after blockaders hurled a petrol bomb on their vehicle at Kanchan municipality around 6:00am. Driver Badsha Miah, 40, and helper Helal Miah, 38, were sent to the DMCH, said police. Badsha was reportedly in a critical condition.

Meanwhile, in a heroic deed, a driver in Jhalakathi saved the passengers of his bus from a firebomb attack after he ploughed his vehicles through a group of arsonists led by Taijul Islam, Rajapur upazila unit president of Islami Chhatra Shibir.

Police said Taijul and his associates threw a petrol bomb at the Dhaka-bound Eagle Paribahan bus when it reached Balaybari under police escort on Friday night.

As Taijul, having missed on his first attempt, was preparing to throw another, the driver drove right into them, injuring Taijul.

However, he lost control on the wheels and the bus veered off the road. The driver and a passenger were also injured in the incident, police said.

Taijul was arrested while the driver was rewarded with Tk 10,000 by police for his heroic act.

Meanwhile, at least 14 activists of the BNP, Jamaat and banned outfit Hiz but-Tahrir were detained from different areas in the capital, 25 in Chittagong and four in Dinajpur allegedly for plotting subversive activities, police said.

He had a choice

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Tara Mia did not know the fate of his wife Sonavan and 12-year-old son Sujan. He asked this correspondent about them.

He was not told that Sujan had already died around four hours ago. His wife also died around 4:00pm.

"None of my family members is involved in politics. So, why should we be the victim of politics," Tara asked.

"I was going to Dhaka to look for a job and support my family."

He did not even have the money to buy bus tickets for Dhaka. His elder son, who works in a garment factory in Dhaka, sent money for tickets. He along with his wife, daughter and the other son got on a bus for Dhaka from Secha Panchpir Bazar of Sundarganj in Gaibandha around 9:30pm Friday.

"Initially, we all were scared. But we felt relieved when we saw police and BCB [Border Guard Bangladesh] vehicles escorting a convoy of buses, including ours," said Tara.

The escorts could not protect them. Alleged blockaders hurled a petrol bomb at their bus in Tulsighat area of Gaibandha around 10:45pm.

"All windows of the bus were kept closed as it was cold. Most passengers were asleep. Suddenly, there was a bang," said Tara, adding that the bus caught fire immediately and all were trying to get out.

"I broke a window and pushed my daughter Tanjina out. Then I jumped out. My wife Sonavan and son Sujan also managed to get down even though they were critically injured," he said.

"Passengers were screaming as they were getting burnt."

The injuries of Tara and his daughter were not as severe as that of Sujan and Sonavan. Doctors said the father and daughter were out of danger.

The bodies of the mother and son were taken to Chandnipur of Sundarganj. Tara and his daughter might not be able to attend their funeral.