



Fire engulfs a court building inside the compound of Senior Judicial Magistrate's Court in Barisal. Many important documents were burnt in the arson.

PHOTO: STAR

NO-CONFIDENCE IN JUDGE

HC hearing on Khaleda's pleas next month

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday adjourned until April the hearing on two petitions of Khaleda Zia expressing no-confidence in a trial court judge, who is dealing with Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable Trust graft cases.

The HC bench led by Justice Md Rezaul Haque said the petitions would be included in its hearing list on April 1 or 2 after the court would reopen on April 1 following its upcoming annual vacation.

Both the divisions of the Supreme Court will be on the vacation from March 17.

The HC bench of Justice Rezaul and Justice Md Khasruzzaman was expected to hold the hearing on the Khaleda's petitions yesterday.

But the hearing was adjourned as Justice Khasruzzaman was not present in the bench. Justice Bishmadev Chakraborty replaced Justice Khasruzzaman during yesterday's

court proceedings.

The BNP chairperson filed the petitions on January 28 expressing apprehension that she would not get justice from Abu Ahmed Jamadar of the Special Judge Court-3 of Dhaka as he had not allowed her prayer for adjourning the case proceedings earlier.

In the petitions, Khaleda appealed to the HC to direct the government to transfer the cases to the court of another judge.

On February 25, the court of Abu Ahmed Jamadar issued warrants for the arrest of Khaleda, her son Tarique Rahman and another accused in the graft cases for not appearing before it on a given date.

On March 3, she included two prayers in the petitions, seeking a stay on the lower court order that issued the warrant for her arrest.

During yesterday's hearing, Khaleda's lawyer Zainul Abedin prayed to the court to fix a date for hearing the petitions.

PM wants Khaleda to surrender

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday hoped that BNP chief Khaleda Zia would surrender to the court showing respect to the law of the land as a warrant has been issued for her arrest.

"I hope she (Khaleda) would abide by the law. A warrant has been issued for her arrest and she would surrender to the court as a gentleman does usually. If she doesn't [do so], then the country's people won't spare her," Hasina said.

The prime minister was speaking at a function after distributing cheques of financial assistance to burn victims and their family members as well as the owners of different vehicles burned during hartal and blockade enforced by the 20-party alliance.

She handed the cheques of financial assistance of Tk 1,57,08,000 to some 199 owners of 270 vehicles damaged during the hartals and ongoing blockade.

Hasina also handed over family savings certificates of Tk 10 lakh each to some 33 burn victims and family members of four deceased burn victims worth Tk 85,00,000. Besides, the blind mother of a burn victim, Selina Begum, received a family savings certificate of Tk five lakh. The Prime Minister's Office would also provide her Tk 5,000 per month.

The PM alleged that Khaleda Zia does not abide by the law at all as she did not appear before the court on 67 occasions. "She (Khaleda) wants to push Bangladesh towards destruction which is very unfortunate," she added.

Khaleda briefs press today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia will brief the media today on the current political situation in the country.

The press conference will be held at 4:00pm at her Gulshan office in the capital, said a BNP statement yesterday. She has been staying in the office since January 3.

"Khaleda Zia at the press conference will highlight the current situation in the country and the stance of the BNP-led 20-party alliance," read the release.

Party insiders said the BNP chief will justify the prolonged blockade on top of intermittent hartals by the combine. The blockade enters its 67th day today.

She is likely to elaborate on the "government's failures, misdeeds, repressive acts and widespread violation of human rights". She will also talk about the violence during the blockade and hartals.

The former prime minister is unlikely to withdraw the ongoing blockade. She might announce a public rally in the capital or any fresh agitation programme.

It will be her second press conference since January 6 when the alliance enforced the nonstop countrywide blockade demanding a midterm election under a non-partisan administration.

In the statement, Khaleda strongly condemned "the arrest" of BNP Joint Secretary General Salahuddin Ahmed. She demanded the government free him immediately.

Dhaka seeks Red Crescent help to rescue abductees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Bangladesh embassy in Tripoli yesterday sought assistance from the Red Crescent to expedite efforts to rescue two Bangladeshi nationals who were allegedly abducted in Libya by a militant group linked to the ISIS.

"I have met the Red Crescent officials in Tripoli today [Thursday] and sought their assistance to rescue the abductees. They have assured us of providing all possible help," ASM Ashraf Islam, counsellor (Labour Wing) at the embassy, told The Daily Star over the phone.

An unknown militant group kidnapped two Bangladeshis along with

seven other foreigners from al-Ghani oil field, south of Sirte, on March 6.

All the kidnapped migrants worked for the Austrian oil services company VAOS.

Although six days have passed since the incident happened, the embassy remains in the dark about the militant group and the whereabouts of the Bangladeshi workers.

Ashraf Islam said the oil services company too could not confirm the identity of the militant group.

The Bangladesh embassy submitted a note verbale to the Libyan foreign ministry on Wednesday, formally requesting their assistance to rescue the abductees, the counsellor added.

7 killed, 50 injured

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be known.

Members of the Coast Guard, the Navy, the Army, the police and the fire brigade were conducting the rescue operation cordoning off the 4062sqft warehouse.

It was difficult to estimate the number of workers trapped under the rubble or how many were released after primary treatment, rescuers said.

Awal, a worker, who luckily escaped the accident, said as many as 180 workers were working in the building when the roof collapsed.

Most labourers were hired from Rupshaghat in Khulna yesterday for the construction of the warehouse roof, he said.

An official of Sena Kalyan

Sangtha, however, said the number of workers could be over 90.

Joyal Abedin, in charge of fire service in Bagerhat, said, "A good number of more workers might be stuck under the debris."

"The rescue operation will continue as long as workers are believed to be trapped under the debris," SP Nizamul said.

The official of Sena Kalyan Sangtha said it was an extended building of Mongla Cement Factory, one of the biggest industrial units of Sena Kalyan Sangtha. The building is on the Passure river near Mongla Port.

Sena Kalyan Sangtha's secretary told The Daily Star over the phone that the contract for the construction was awarded to China National Building Material (CNBM)

Company Ltd through an international tender.

ITCL, a local construction company, was building the roof as a local agent of the Chinese company.

"The scaffolding for the roof might have been weak causing the collapse," a Sena Kalyan Sangtha official speculated.

Asked for reasons behind the accident, ITCL site engineer Rafiqul Islam declined to comment.

The warehouse was scheduled to be handed over to Sena Kalyan Sangtha in November this year.

Sena Kalyan Sangtha Mongla Cement Factory's Deputy Director General Captain Syed Helal Hossain said they had formed a three-member committee to probe the accident.

Thank you

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Bangladesh has already reached the targets on cutting the number of poor and poverty gap ratio, and reducing under-five mortality rate under Goal 1 -- Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger. The Household Income and Expenditure Survey of 2010 data show that poverty has declined at a rate of 2.47 percent per year since 1991-92 in Bangladesh. It can be said that the target of halving the population living below the poverty line was already achieved in 2012.

We also pledged to support the process of economic growth through a market-based, competitive and private sector-driven economy.

Today as we look back on the past twenty four years, we can take great satisfaction at the economic picture of the country of which we have been a regular reporter and, in terms of policy reforms, an actor.

In the past decades, the economy has grown at nearly 6 percent per year despite natural disasters, soaring fuel and food prices, and other global financial crises. In the past two decades, poverty was reduced by nearly one third whereas life expectancy, literacy and per capita food production have increased significantly. More than 15 million Bangladeshis have moved out of poverty since 1992.

Bangladesh improved access to all levels of education, especially to the primary level. As a result of massive expansion of supply, targeted stipends to bring the poorest and girls into schools and continued investments in education, Bangladesh achieved almost universal access to primary education. The primary net enrolment rate (NER) is most recently reported at 93 percent.

With 98 percent of girls enrolled in primary schools and enrolment of girls in secondary schools over 6 million from 1.1 million in 1991, Bangladesh is a role model for similarly placed countries.

In achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) Bangladesh has made remarkable progress. It has either already achieved the first five of eight goals or is about to.

Under Goal 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education, the country is set to accomplish 100 percent net enrolment ratio in primary education.

Under Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women, the girl to boy ratio in primary and secondary education has already been achieved.

Bangladesh has performed superbly in reaching Goal 4: Reduce Child Mortality, where it has either achieved targets in all indicators or is on track to reach them.

Five targets have been met while two are to be achieved under Goal-6: Combating HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases.

The country is likely to reach targets on lessening maternal mortality ratio, and raising contraceptive prevalence and the proportion of births attended by skilled health personnel.

Exports doubled in the last six years from \$15.57 billion in 2008-09 to \$30.18 billion in 2013-14. Although in the first eight months of the current fiscal year, the export growth is about two percent, we have to keep in mind that we achieved this on high growth and amid domestic and international challenges. We can easily have \$50 billion in apparel exports by 2021 if we can give adequate infrastructural support and maintain political stability.

Foreign currency reserves have crossed \$23 billion in February for the

first time in the country's history.

Bangladesh is one of the top ten recipients of remittance in the world, according to the World Bank. Bangladesh earned \$14.22 billion in inward remittance in the last fiscal year.

Inflows of FDI into Bangladesh rose 24 percent year-on-year to \$1.6 billion in 2013, according to the latest report by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development.

According to a study of the Japan External Trade Organisation (JETRO), Bangladesh is the most cost comparative advantageous country for operating business. Despite this advantageous situation, per capita FDI is one of the lowest in the world.

Bangladesh is one of the top destinations for investors planning to relocate their businesses from China.

The per capita income is \$1,190 -- a figure whose repeat for three consecutive years could make the country a middle-income nation in the foreseeable future.

Since independence, food production has more than tripled to 35 million tonnes, making the country self-sufficient on food production.

Garment industry accounts for 80 percent of the country's export earnings. It contributes more than 10 percent to GDP and employs 3.6 million people directly, 80 percent of them women. The industry has created a platform for 2.8 million women to engage in new productive role in the society as well as empowering them.

Drawing examples of India's growth story, Prof Amartya Sen said India's per capita GDP doubled over the last three decades compared to Bangladesh, while life expectancy in Bangladesh is now three years more than that of India.

Our employed population, according to the provisional data of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, was

44.3 million in 2003 that has increased to 58.1 million in 2013.

We have deliberately discussed our economic success rather elaborately only to drive home the tragedy that our destructive politics is bringing upon us. Given the above economic picture, it would not be an exaggeration to say that Bangladesh is poised to take off in a significant way to reach the goals of becoming a middle income country by 2021. But politics appears to be coming in the way.

Just as the country has been on a positive growth trajectory since the restoration of democracy, so also we had been on a similar trajectory in democracy and fundamental freedoms. Regular elections and alternation of the parties in government led to a feeling that people could punish rulers for their failures. Enactment of some progressive laws, establishment of the Human Rights and Information Commissions and some such moves set us on a pro-democracy course. The last two decades also showed a tremendous growth of private media in print, TV and radio, not to mention the growth of online media that has added to open public discourse at least among a section of the citizenry.

However, the unrelenting rivalry between our two political parties over the same period, which grew from non-violent to petrol bombing of the innocent in the hands of BNP and Jamaat has now brought the nation to a zero-sum political game that confronts us with disastrous consequences. The culture of hartals and parliament boycott started by the Awami League at the beginning of our post-Ershad journey, against which this paper has been an untiring voice, fatally reduced the effectiveness of the most important organ of parliamentary democracy- namely our Jatiya Sangsad.

Politicisation of vital organs of the

government, namely the bureaucracy and the law enforcement agencies, especially the police, has greatly compromised the neutrality of the civic administration which is of crucial importance for good governance. Absence of elected local government and lack of transparency and accountability at all levels have led to massive corruption which has affected the government's ability to deliver.

Overarching above everything is the dangerous phenomenon of "culture of impunity" that has disempowered the ordinary citizens in a manner hitherto unknown, creating a sense of insecurity among ordinary citizens that hits at the very core of democratic governance.

To put it bluntly, we are doing impressively well on the economic front but depressingly bad in the political arena, with the clear possibility that bad politics may ultimately destroy our good economics.

It is in these challenging times that The Daily Star thrives into the future. The question is: how are we to remain an independent, patriotic and objective voice in the midst of a growingly acrimonious and violent, partisan politics that is threatening the future prosperity of the country and all its freedoms?

However tough the challenge, however treacherous the path, however antagonistic the powers that be, we pledge to our readers, patrons and advertisers to serve the nation and our readers with the same determination and professionalism that has marked our record of the last twenty four years.

We have always believed that free and independent media is one of the best guarantors of democracy and welfare of the people. That has motivated us to be one, and it is the same spirit and vision that will guide our actions in the future.

Once again, thank you all, readers, patrons and advertisers.

HC rule on govt over missing Salahuddin

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secretary general of BNP, before the court within 24 hours.

As per law, police have to produce a detainee before a court within 24 hours of his detention.

Opposing the prayer during the hearing on the petition, Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said the inspector general of police has informed him that law enforcers have not detained the BNP leader.

Hasina's lawyers, however, told the

court that law enforcers picked up Salahuddin from a house in the capital's Uttara around 10:15pm on Tuesday.

Uttara Police Station has refused to record a general diary over Salahuddin's detention, they added.

The court asked the home secretary, inspector general of police, director general of Rab, DMP commissioner, additional inspectors general of Special Branch (SB) of police and Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police; deputy commissioner of Dhaka

and officer-in-charge of Uttara Police Station to reply to the rule by Sunday, Deputy Attorney General Md Bashir Ullah told The Daily Star.

Khandker Mahbub Hossain, Jamiruddin Sircar and Moudud Ahmed appeared for the petitioner.

Salahuddin, a former state minister, on behalf of the BNP-led 20-party alliance frequently called hartals by issuing press releases. He was acting as the BNP spokesperson.

Talking to newsmen at Mirpur Police

Staff College, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal, state minister for home, yesterday said: "It's not clear to us whether he [Salahuddin] went somewhere or was picked up by someone..." we will conduct an investigation."

Had the law enforcers picked up Salahuddin, they would have produced him before the court within 24 hours as per law, he mentioned.

PRESS BRIEFING

Hours after the HC ruling, Hasina Ahmed spoke to the press at the office of Law

Reporters Forum at a High Court building.

Under any circumstances it is not acceptable that a man would go missing after being arrested by law enforcers, she said. "I want that he [Salahuddin's] immediately returns to my family safe and unhurt."

Hasina also alleged that law enforcers last Saturday picked up two drivers and a personal secretary of Salahuddin without any specific charges and tortured them in custody. Later, they were sued for blasting bombs.