



STAR HOSTS RECEPTION ON ITS 24TH ANNIVERSARY

Personalities representing a wide range of citizens -- politicians, academics, diplomats, businesspersons, journalists, art luminaries, celebrities and civil society members -- gather at the Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in the capital yesterday evening as The Daily Star celebrates its 24th founding anniversary. Chairperson of Mediaworld Ltd, the owning company of The Daily Star, Rokia Afzal Rahman, top right, thanked the readers, advertisers, and patrons for being with the newspaper's journey to uphold people's right to know and a free media. The guests were enthralled by musical performances later on.

PHOTO: STAR



UN again calls for dialogue

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations has reiterated its call for political dialogue and de-escalation of tensions in Bangladesh.

"I don't have an update beyond reiterating what we've said here for political dialogue and for de-escalating the tensions in Bangladesh," said Stéphane Dujarric, spokesman for the UN secretary-general.

He made the remarks when a journalist drew his attention to the "arrest" of BNP Joint Secretary General Salahuddin Ahmed during the daily briefing at the UN headquarters in New York on Thursday.

The journalist also wanted to know whether there had been any further efforts to send any official from the UN to Bangladesh.

In response, Stéphane said he does not have any update on the issue, but he will try to "get some more" for the journalist.

The family of Salahuddin and the BNP claimed that law enforcers had picked up the BNP leader from a house in the capital's Uttara recently.

Tigers

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ball Guptill played with a straight bat and went on to score his sixth century. The pair shared a 131-run stand in the third wicket. The momentum of the game however shifted after Bangladesh took wickets at regular intervals once Shakib gave the much-needed breakthrough by dismissing Guptill.

Ultimately though Daniel Vettori, who was dropped by Nasir Hossain late in the innings, smacked a six in the 48th over and New Zealand needed just 11 off 12 balls.

Shakib, who was captaining in place of the rested Mashrafe, opted to go with himself instead of Rubel Hossain in the 49th over and the move unfortunately led to the end of the game.

He was smacked for a six and a four in the first two balls by Tim Southee to bring an anti-climatic end to the match.

Unlike the competitive game at the Seddon Park, England romped to a comfortable nine-wicket win against Afghanistan at Sydney in the day's other game.

Fresh election only solution

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blockade entered its 67th day yesterday, she demanded talks for holding an inclusive election. "If the ruling party does not engage in talks, the onus is on it for solving the crisis."

Observing that the current political deadlock has its roots in the 15th amendment that scrapped the provision for caretaker administration, Khaleda said the ruling party can bring back the system paving the way for an election under a non-party government.

In her 40-minute speech from 4:45pm, the former prime minister claimed the BNP and allies had to enforce hartal and blockade; they were left with no other option after the government rejected her seven-

point proposal placed in late December.

She went on: "We are aware of the sufferings of people and our leaders and activists. But the ruling party leaders never care about this. Clinging to power is more important to them than mitigating people's sufferings."

Accusing the government of using law enforcement agencies, including the Rab and BGB, as weapons to crush the opposition, she called upon the law enforcers to discharge their duties lawfully.

Also chief of the 20-party combine, Khaleda called upon people to unite against the Awami League government. "Forge a national unity through the movement."

She demanded release of the

opposition leaders and activists arrested across the country, an end to "enforced disappearances, killings and harassment by police and joint forces", withdrawal of all "false cases" against the 20-party men and punishment to those responsible for extrajudicial killings following a fair investigation.

She also demanded withdrawal of "bans on political activities including rallies and processions".

If these demands are met, Khaleda said, "I believe we will be able to go forward towards resolving the crisis."

Holding the ruling party men responsible for subversive activities, including petrol bomb attacks on public vehicles, Khaleda demanded an international and credible inves-

tigation and punishment to the "real culprits".

"We are in a movement to restore people's democratic rights, including their right to vote. So people are with us and we can't attack them. There is no question of our involvement in such misdeeds that will ultimately benefit the government."

Having failed to suppress the opposition's movement, the ruling party has chosen the path of subversive activities including petrol bomb attacks on public transport, she alleged.

"We have long been demanding the government identify and punish those involved in such heinous terrorist activities, but it did not pay heed to our calls," she said, adding

that the AL is using the tragic deaths of innocent people to gain political mileage.

Khaleda alleged that the government is carrying out a false propaganda to brand people's democratic movement as militant activities only to ignore the "justified demands". It will do no good but benefit the "real militants".

"I once again want to say unequivocally that the BNP and 20-party alliance do not believe in the politics of killing."

At the beginning of the press conference, her press secretary Maruf Kamal Khan told reporters that the BNP chief will not entertain any queries, as she wants to focus on her written statement.

DB arrests key man behind 'BasherKella'

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Fighter, the DB said.

Fahad led a group of 50 tech-savvy people, trained to run online propaganda by publishing doctored photographs, caricatures, misquoted or confusing statements of renowned personalities, and distorted facts, said Monirul Islam at a briefing at the DB headquarters yesterday.

"Through different posts, they tried to incite the armed forces and instigate mutiny in police," he added.

Fahad has been shown arrested in a case filed under the ICT act with Pallabi Police Station in the capital, DB sources said.

A Dhaka court yesterday placed him on an eight-day remand.

However, the BasherKella page, which has nearly 9 lakh followers, in a post termed the police claim a rumour, and said all its administrators including the chief admin were safe.

Meanwhile, Fahad's father Khondker Mohammad Samiuddin, who had been roaming around the DB headquarters for the past few days telling journalists that his son had been made to disappear, could not be reached on his mobile phone yesterday.

On Wednesday, he claimed to

journalists that Fahad had come to his sister's place on March 3, and on Monday, some people posing as DB men picked him up from there.

A DUBIOUS PAST

The Daily Star talked to some journalists in Banshkhali and Chittagong to learn about Fahad's past.

They told this paper that Fahad was introduced to the Chhatra Shibir politics by his maternal uncle Shahidul Hoque, the Nayeb-E-Amir of Sadhanpur union Jamaat.

They said Fahad's cousins are accused in a number of cases filed over arson attacks in Banshkhali following a post on the BasherKella

page, showing a doctored image of Jamaat leader Delawar Hossain Sayedee's face appearing on the moon after a war crimes tribunal sentenced Sayedee in February 2013.

Fahad's father Samiuddin is the incumbent chairman of Banshkhali's Sadhanpur union parishad, where law enforcers busted a militant training camp and recovered a large cache of arms and ammunitions, including three AK-22 rifles, on February 22.

Neighbours and the journalists said rumour has it that Fahad was involved in running the training camp.

Samiuddin fought against the AL-

backed candidate to become the Sadhanpur UP chairman. Three years ago, Samiuddin joined the Awami League, immediately causing a rift in the local unit of the ruling party, according to them.

During the last upazila election in Banshkhali, Fahad ran a large-scale propaganda campaigns against the AL-backed candidate and for the Jamaat-favoured candidate through his news site -- banshkhalinews24.com, they said.

"He would rarely visit his village and when he did, he wouldn't be available to talk to," said a local journalist, seeking anonymity.

Khaleda lied to divert people's attention: AL

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"Would you [Khaleda] kindly tell us where, when and on which date our prime minister said this?"

He said people would not fall for Khaleda's falsehood or her attempt to shift blame.

to foil the elections. Hanif said 500 polling centres were torched and 142 voters were killed during the polls.

On the abolishment of the caretaker government system, which the BNP-led alliance is agitating to have restored, the AL leader said every political party raised allegations against the system after being defeated in polls since 1996.

He claimed that the system was

nullified in higher court after the AL assumed power in 2009. The party has introduced a democratic process to hold general elections following the system in place in other democracies.

Hanif said the BNP chief in 2007 had said people did not want the caretaker government system and that the people would throw it away one day.

Referring to the deaths in arson

attacks since January 5, when the alliance called an indefinite nationwide blockade, and the torching of over 1,200 vehicles, he said Khaleda would have to face trial for those.

"It has already been proved who are behind these subversive activities," he said, adding that those who have been caught, by people and police, were members of the BNP's and Jamaat's associated bodies.

On Khaleda's claim that people were with the ongoing movement, the AL leader said the BNP leaders and workers themselves were not observing the agitation programmes.

"We condemn and protest Khaleda Zia's statements and demand their withdrawal," he said.

The AL would give an elaborate response to the BNP chief's statement today.