

Go tough on militancy

PM asks law enforcers, high officials

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the law enforcement agencies and local administrations to take tough measures against terrorism and militancy.

"You will have to take appropriate measures so that there are no militant activities in Bangladesh. There will be no room for militancy in the country," she said.

The PM was exchanging views with administrations of Patuakhali, Netrakona, Bholá, Jhalakathi, Narayanganj and Shariatpur districts and divisional commissioner's office in Dhaka and Barisal through video conference.

Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan moderated the video conferencing at the Cabinet Division of the Secretariat.

Hasina thanked the senior officials of the districts for tackling "bad times" during the BNP-Jamaat's three-month-long non-stop blockades and hartals across the country.



She criticised the BNP-Jamaat alliance for unleashing violence in the name of hartal and blockade that killed around 185 people in the last three months.

"I've no words to express my hatred for these barbaric acts," Hasina said.

She directed the officials to take preparation in advance to cope with natural disasters in the country, especially in the southern region.

Expressing deep shock at the loss of lives and properties in north-western parts of the

country in the last two days, the PM asked the local administrations to stay beside the disaster-hit people round the clock.

Earlier at the cabinet meeting, she criticised some of the ministers for disregarding a 2009 order that discouraged wearing suits in summer.

"Is it our dress?" a minister quoted her as saying. "It is the dress of the British," the PM snapped at her cabinet colleagues, saying they still have that servile attitude.

The government had earlier issued a directive to its officials for not wearing suits and coats during summer in a bid to cut down on use of air-conditioner and reduce wastage of electricity. The directive is applicable during March to November.

The cabinet meeting approved in principle 'The Ports (Amendment) Act-2015' to clear legal bar in setting up infrastructure in port areas across the country.

It also approved "National Social Security Strategy of Bangladesh".



Monipuri kids elated after getting textbooks in their mother tongue at Vanubeel Monipuri Language Centre in Kamalganj upazila of Moulvibazar yesterday. The books were distributed during a programme titled "promoting education and mother tongue of indigenous children" through which three Monipuri language centres started their journey.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Risky, illegal

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north-wester left the car of lawmaker Haji Salim, a police van, three minibuses and several rickshaws damaged. The MP, who was in the car, was unhurt but two rickshaw pullers were wounded.

In many cases officials of the two Dhaka city corporations and ruling Awami League men "authorise" illegal billboards for money, said sources in both the corporations.

Some city officials are even running advertisement businesses when it is their duty to check the abnormal growth.

"The authorities don't dare take action because of some officials and ruling party's involvement," an official said, requesting anonymity.

Exact numbers are not available, but sources say Dhaka South City Corporation has about 900 legal billboards against some 1,500 illegal ones (of which 527 are privately owned). In Dhaka North City Corporation, there are about 1,500 legal billboards against some 1,200 illegal ones.

Of those illegal in the DNCC, 257 were permitted by the Cantonment Board, 173 by the Air Force, 147 by the Bangladesh Railway, 10 by Dhaka Wasa and 22 by Bangladesh Police, while 443 are owned by private citizens, said a city official.

In recent years, such haphazardly erected billboards proved fatal. On March 15, 2010, two people died and eight others were injured when an 800 square feet hoarding sitting wobbly atop a shopping complex in Gulshan-1 collapsed. On April 20 the following year, a giant billboard collapsed near Dhanmondi Road-8 during a storm, though there was no casualty in the incident.

Contacted, Ansar Ali Khan, chief executive officer of DSCC, said they could not conduct drives in many cases for a lack of logistics, manpower and police force.

Many illegal billboards are set up at night, and even if the city officials carry out a drive, they can pull down at best three of them in a day.

Ansar added they were serious about the illegal billboards and would carry out drives to take those down.

Bipon Kumar Saha, chief waste management officer of DNCC, said they did not have logistics to conduct drives and needed to hire those whenever they went for a drive.

Another official in the north city said they published a notice in newspapers in February, giving 15 days' time for the illegal billboard owners to take permission from the city authorities by March 13.

"We have got applications from 18 firms for authorisation of 36 billboards so far," he said, adding that they would conduct drives against illegal billboards soon.

Under the law, prior permission of the city corporation is a must for setting up billboards. It is also mandatory for ad firms and private owners to collect no-objection certificates from authorised engineers as a proof of safety. But most companies and private owners violate the rules, said Bipon.

About the alleged involvement of some city officials in corruption, he said they would take action against them if found guilty.

Hoardings set up on high voltage electric cables may cause heavy casualties during powerful storms, said Md Rashed, general secretary of Outdoor Billboard Owners Association.

He also stressed that the city corporation engineers should keep vigilance so that no firms can set up risky billboards.

"Also, the authorities should not allow billboards here and there and thus ruin the city's beauty," he added.

In the past, the united Dhaka City Corporation used to follow some rules before giving permission for billboards. Back then there was a ban on setting up hoardings near 14 buildings and monuments, including Pantha Kunja, the National Museum and different hospitals. Also, billboards over electric cables were prohibited. But these rules are not followed now, officials said.

"The advertisement business is not in the hands of businessmen anymore. It is now controlled by the ruling party men. Most of them don't care for the law or safety measures," said a businessman, asking not to be named.

Dismissed

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reached the jail authorities.

The speculations grew stronger when the Dhaka Central Jail authorities asked Kamaruzzaman's family to meet him at the jail in the afternoon. A large number of journalists thronged the jail gate.

The jail authorities usually allow a convict's family to meet him hours before execution.

Sixteen members of the Jamaat leader's family, including his wife and children, met him around 7:00pm.

Defence lawyers told reporters that the prison authorities would carry out the death sentence only after receiving the SC order. And the convict must be given a "reasonable time" to seek presidential mercy.

Talking to The Daily Star around 2:30pm, Farman Ali, senior superintendent of Dhaka Central Jail, said the prison authorities were ready, but wouldn't carry out the execution until they received the court order.

Around 5:15pm, he told reporters that they were yet to get a copy of the judgment. "I cannot comment on the matter [presidential clemency] until I get the order and communicate the matter to the convict."

Talking to reporters around 8:00pm, Farman said Kamaruzzaman

wouldn't be executed yesterday, as the verdict's copy didn't reach the jail authorities.

Earlier in the evening, defence lawyer Shishir Manir told this correspondent that the SC order was yet to be communicated to the convict.

"We are of the opinion that without formal communication of Supreme Court's order, no authority can take initiative to execute Mr Kamaruzzaman," he said.

Contacted at 6:40pm, SC Registrar Syed Aminul Islam said the SC judgment was yet to reach the section that dispatches the court order to the authorities concerned.

WHO SAID WHAT

Following the SC judgment, there was no legal bar to executing Kamaruzzaman, said Attorney General Mahbubey Alam.

If a death row convict seeks presidential clemency, he will not be executed until the president gives his decision. The prison authorities will give him a "reasonable time" to seek presidential clemency.

"If Kamaruzzaman does not seek clemency or the president rejects his mercy petition, the jail authorities will allow his family members to meet him for the last time," Mahbubey said at a press briefing at his office.

Once Kamaruzzaman's family meets him, the authorities will fix the time for his execution, he said.

Law Minister Anisul Huq told reporters that the SC verdict would be executed at the "earliest possible time on completion of the remaining formalities."

The jail code would not be applicable to Kamaruzzaman, and a reasonable time -- a few hours -- would be given to him, said the minister.

Earlier in the morning, Kamaruzzaman's lawyer Shishir Manir said unless they met him, it wasn't possible to say whether his client would seek presidential clemency.

They sought the jail authorities' permission to meet him to decide the next course of action but to no avail.

Kamaruzzaman's family members, however, met him at the jail for about an hour.

The convict's elder son, Hasan Iqbal, later told reporters that his father will have discussions with his counsels and decide whether to seek presidential clemency once the full judgment is communicated to him.

He said his father was not worried and was in good health. Hasan was seen flashing a "V" sign as he left the jail gate after talking to some reporters.

REACTIONS

The law minister, the attorney general, prosecutors, pro-liberation organisations, campaigners for war crimes trial and freedom fighters expressed satisfaction over the verdict.

Freedom fighters and locals of Sohagpur hailed the verdict, and demanded immediate execution of the Jamaat leader.

With the help of Pakistan occupation forces, Kamaruzzaman and his Al-Badr men had massacred 164 civilians and raped many women in Sohagpur of Sherpur during the Liberation War.

"I testified against Kamaruzzaman. I was worried as he filed petitions [appeal and review petitions] repeatedly. But now I am happy. Everyone of the village wants him to hang," said a widow and rape victim of Sohagpur.

Shahab Uddin, commander of Nalitabari Upazila Muktiyoddha Sangsad, said they felt relieved after the verdict.

The souls of the martyrs will find peace once he is executed, he said.

Within 75 minutes of the pronouncement of the verdict, Jamaat called a 48-hour nationwide shutdown from 6:00am today, protesting what it said was "the government's conspiracy to kill Muhammad Kamaruzzaman."

Revised trade deal with India okayed

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trade could only be done between the two neighbours. Besides, India could transport goods to its seven northeastern states.

Talking to The Daily Star, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed said the revised deal would be signed either during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka or Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's trip to New Delhi.

He termed the modified agreement a milestone in Indo-Bangla relations. Nepal and Bhutan have similar agreements with India, added the minister.

The deal would be in force for five years instead of the existing tenure

of three years.

Regarding fees and charges, the cabinet secretary said the fees would be fixed through discussions between the two countries. "Bangladesh and India would pay the same fees for transporting goods. It's a win-win situation for both sides."

The agreement will be renewed in every five years if there is no objection from either side. The extended tenure of the deal would boost the confidence of businessmen, said the cabinet secretary.

It can be amended further through mutual agreement of the parties. In case of cancellation, the interested party would have to send

in a notice six months before the expiry of the tenure, mentioned Musharraf.

Cabinet members at the meeting hailed the revised deal saying it would benefit Bangladesh more than India.

Manoj Kumar Roy, additional secretary at the commerce ministry, said the officials of the National Board of Revenue, shipping ministry, and Roads and Highways Department of both the countries would sit soon to fix the transit fees.

Under the revised deal, trucks from Nepal and Bhutan would enter Bangladesh through the Indian corridor. Previously, they were parked at a specific point along the Indian border

where goods from Bangladesh were uploaded.

The governments of Bangladesh and India have taken different measures to increase bilateral trade. At present, the trade balance between the two neighbours is heavily tilted in favour of India.

According to experts, India exports goods worth over \$5 billion a year to Bangladesh through formal channels. But it is believed that products worth around another \$5 billion enter Bangladesh informally.

A minister said Bangladesh would earn a huge amount of revenue from India by allowing it access to Bangladesh territory.

2 held with 27 crude bombs

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police detained two students with 27 crude bombs and bomb-making materials in the capital's Lalbagh yesterday.

The detainees are Belal, 22, a student of Tejgaon College, and Risalat, 24, a student of a private university.

Police claimed that they were Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activists.

Following a tip-off, law enforcers conducted a raid at the second floor of a house in the area and arrested them, said Mofiz

Uddin Ahmed, deputy commissioner (Lalbagh Division) of DMP.

Police recovered the crude bombs and bomb-making materials from rooftop of the house as per information provided by the duo, he said.

"It [raid] was a follow-up action after the seizure of 72 crude bombs from the Lalbagh residence of Jubo Dal's central joint secretary Ali Newajon March 18," the DMP official added.

Police suspect the crude bombs were made to create anarchy in the upcoming city corporation elections.

Mass promotion

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office through the January 5 national polls last year.

The public administration ministry issued separate gazettes last night in this regard upon getting approval of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who is in charge of the ministry.

According to officials at the secretariat, excessive promotion has already made the civil administration top-heavy. Posting and transfer of officials have become very difficult as no vacancy is left in the civil bureaucracy.

Such wholesale promotions, which have been going on for several years, are also responsible for making many officials OSDs (officer on special duty).

On March 24, the public administration ministry sent a summary to the PM seeking her nod for the promotions. The summary contained the names of the promotees.

There are 1,280 deputy secretaries against 830 approved posts, 869 joint secretaries against 350 posts and 229 additional secretaries against 120 posts.

The Superior Selection Board, headed by Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, went through the service records of the officials to prepare a list of the potential promotees.

Sources in the public administration ministry said an official is usually promoted to a higher post when it falls vacant.

Since there is no vacant post, majority of the promoted officials will continue in their current offices. Many officials who got promotion last year are still discharging duties in their previous offices.

Gazettes were issued yesterday for promoting 836 officials. Notifications about 37 others would be issued later as they are on leave.

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