

BNP lost strength to launch anti-govt movement again

PM tells videoconference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina believes BNP will not even think of toppling her government in future after wasting its strength on subversive activities in the name of anti-government movement.

"I hope she [Khaleda Zia] will not have enough strength left to think again of ousting the government in future," she told a videoconference with top district officials of Natore and Feni.

Cabinet Secretary M. Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan conducted the videoconference at the Cabinet Division in Bangladesh Secretariat.

Hasina, also the president of ruling Awami League, alleged BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia had started killing people through arsons since January 5 when the country was progressing fast.

"I have no idea what Khaleda Zia has achieved during her 92-day stay at an office," she said, asking the BNP chief about the reason behind killing people in the name of politics.

"And what she [Khaleda] has achieved through these killings? She had to surrender before a court and go back home," Hasina said, adding, "The Awami League government is still in power at ease."

The premier asked the law-enforcement agencies to track down those, who were behind killing innocent people through arsons during the BNP-Jamaat's three-month-long non-stop blockade.

"They have to face trial. Ensuring security of public life and property is urgently necessary," she told the law enforcers, who took part in the videoconference.

She also asked the district administration to remain vigil so that development activities were executed in time.

"If we all remain united, we will be able to overcome the situation. Bangladesh will again run on the right track of development. I firmly believe we will be able to tackle the loss incurred in the last 92 days," she added.

Giving a brief description of numerous development activities of her government, Hasina said the nation was advancing fast despite the fact that BNP-Jamaat alliance had unleashed a reign of destruction in the country.

She further said investment scenario was fine without any problem.

"Investors came in this volatile situation and invested in our country," she said, adding, the government had succeeded to maintain over 6 percent GDP and put down inflation under 7 percent.



PHOTO: STAR

The AK-22 rifles and the handguns Rab recovered during a drive in Chittagong. They also recovered other weapons along with a huge amount of ammunition. Inset, the four militant suspects the law enforcers arrested. The photos were taken at Rab-7 headquarters in Chittagong.

Hilsa Elusive

FROM PAGE 1

according to market sources.

Skyrocketing prices of hilsa in the run-up to Pahela Baishakh have become a trend for quite a few years now.

Stakeholders attribute the soaring prices to surging demand ahead of Pahela Baishakh against low supply resulting from multiple factors including a government ban (March-April) on catching hilsas in four hilsa sanctuaries out of five.

Traders said production of hilsa this year was low compared to that of previous years, which has also contributed to the price hike.

They said that in previous years, an increase in hilsa export around this time created a fall in supply, which caused prices to soar.

A ban on export of the fish, therefore, has been enforced since July 2012.

After visiting several fish markets in the capital, this correspondent gathered that the export ban has not done much to give buyers a price relief. On the contrary, banking on rising demand against falling supply, traders are charging exorbitant prices for the fish, whether frozen or fresh, imported or local.

However, some traders alleged that hilsa is being smuggled to India and other countries despite the ban.

Hilsa import could come as a relief but importers in Chittagong said high duty and taxes imposed on imported hilsas have not really come to their aid.

INTERNATIONAL PRICES VS LOCAL PRICES

Through email communications, this correspondent collected prices of hilsa in India, the UK, Australia and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

According to reports sent by our Delhi correspondent, a hilsa weighing around 1,000 gram is sold at Rs 700 - Rs 1,000 (Tk 873 - Tk 1,248) in Delhi and at Rs 500 - Rs 1,200 (Tk 624 - Tk 1,497) in Kolkata. The prices do not usually fluctuate there.

In Australia, a hilsa weighing between 1,400 and 2,500 gram is sold

between Australian \$25 - 35 (Tk 1,473 - Tk 2,063), said Nadera Sultana Nodi, a Bangladeshi living in Adelaide.

In the KSA, price of a 1,500 gram hilsa stands at Saudi Riyal 55 or Tk 1,141, according to Zahid Babla, a Bangladeshi migrant worker living in Afif.

COULD RELAXING IMPORT DUTY GIVE PRICE RELIEF?

At present, traders pay 54.5 percent duty and tax, including 25 percent customs duty, to import frozen hilsa.

Some buyers and traders, therefore, said a cut in import duty may serve to increase the supply in domestic markets, providing some price relief to commoners on the eve of the Pahela Baishakh.

"A cut in import duty and taxes will help us bring more hilsa from Myanmar, which will reduce hilsa price," Dodul Kumar Datta, managing director of Chittagong-based Pacific Foods Ltd, an importer of hilsa, told The Daily Star.

Some 4.5 lakh fishermen are directly involved in catching hilsa that accounts for nearly 1 percent of Bangladesh's gross domestic product, now worth US \$150 billion, according to a Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute publication.

Fishermen caught 3.51 lakh tonnes of hilsa in fiscal 2012-13, up from 3.46 lakh tonnes. In addition, traders imported 2,271 tonnes of frozen hilsa mainly from Myanmar in fiscal 2013-14, down from 2,900 tonnes a year ago, according to the Department of Fisheries (DoF).

Datta said hilsas the size of 300-500 gram are mostly imported from Myanmar. Prices of the fish are usually lower in the neighbouring country than those here.

Alibaba.com, a Chinese e-commerce portal, shows that a firm from Myanmar, Min Aye Yar Company, offered a minimum of 25 tonnes of hilsa at a price between US \$4 and \$8 per kilogram on April 6.

TRADERS' FEAST

Traders said because of the ban on hilsa-netting, the bulk of the supply

ahead of Baishakh comes from cold storages where the fish was preserved mainly in the peak catching season of July-September.

"Most of the supply available now in markets at exorbitant prices were purchased several months ago and kept in cold storages at much lower prices," said Ajit Das, a trader in Barisal.

A one-kilogram hilsa which sold at around Tk 900 during the peak catching season now sells twice or thrice that price, said Ajit, also president of Hilsa Exporters Association.

Anwar Hossain Sikder, president of Dhaka City Small Fish Traders Association, said a section of traders buy fresh hilsa nearly a month in advance for making extra bucks during the Pahela Baishakh festival.

"They stock the fish and begin clearing the stocks a couple of days ahead of the festival," he said.

Syed Arif Azad, director general of DoF, said the fisheries agency does not have any law to fight hoarding of the fish.

"We can only request the private sector not to hoard the fish and hike prices artificially. We requested them last year to refrain from this practice. We have done the same this year too," he said.

Azad opined that consumers' rights protection authorities should come forward to prevent hoarding. "We will again hold meetings with traders to pursue them not to make excessive profit," he said.

CAN THERE BE A PRICE RELIEF?

Asked if import duty would be reduced, Azad said his office wants to protect local fishermen and prevent entry of contaminated fish with various health hazards.

He, however, said import duty can be eased prior to Baishakh for a temporary period.

"But it should be done in a way so that the interests of producers are also safeguarded. There should be a balance between producers' and consumers' interests," he said.

Despite repeated attempts,

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed could not be reached for comment on the issue.

Contacted, Md Nojibur Rahman, chairman of the National Board of Revenue, said the proposal to cut duty on hilsa import for a short period to give respite to consumers ahead of Baishakh merits attention.

"It deserves consideration. But time is too short to consider the proposal now. It [duty cut or waiver] can be a nice gift for all Bangladeshis on the occasion of Baishakh next year. But whatever we do will be done in consultation with all stakeholders," he said.

Saudi-led planes hit Yemen rebels as gunfire kills five

AFP, Aden

Saudi-led warplanes hit rebel positions in southern Yemen yesterday including the rebel-held presidential palace in Aden as gunfire killed five people in the port city, medics and residents said.

The palace complex in the main southern city was President Abedrabbo Mansour Hadi's last refuge before he fled to neighbouring Saudi Arabia as the coalition air war began on March 26 and has been repeatedly targeted by air strikes.

Coalition aircraft also hit rebel positions and checkpoints at the entrances to Aden in the sorties that continued until 6:00 am, residents said.

Two civilians and three militiamen loyal to Hadi were killed by gunfire in the city, a medic said.

The Huthi Shiite rebels and their allies in army units loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh clashed with Hadi supporters in several neighbourhoods during the night, residents said.

Further east, coalition air strikes hit Huthi positions in another southern province, Shabwa, witnesses said.

Günter Grass dies at 87

FROM PAGE 1

Nazi era but later ran into controversy over his own World War II past and stance toward Israel, he died. He was 87.

Matthias Wegener, spokesman for the Steidl publishing house, confirmed that Grass died Monday morning in a Luebeck hospital.

Grass was lauded by Germans for helping to revive their culture in the aftermath of World War II, and giving voice and support to democratic discourse in the postwar nation.

"His literary legacy will stand next to that of Goethe," German Culture Minister Monika Gruetters said in a statement following the news of his death.

Yet Grass provoked the ire of many in 2006 when he revealed in his memoir "Skinning the Onion" that, as a teenager, he had served in the Waffen-SS, the combat arm of Adolf Hitler's notorious paramilitary organization.

In 2012, Grass also drew sharp criticism at home and was declared persona non grata by Israel after publishing a prose poem, "What Must Be Said," in which he criticized what he described as Western hypocrisy over Israel's nuclear program and labeled the country a threat to "already fragile world peace" over its belligerent stance on Iran.

A trained sculptor, Grass made his literary reputation with "The Tin Drum," published in 1959. It was followed by "Cat and Mouse" and "Dog Years," which made up what is called the Danzig Trilogy — after the town of his birth, now the Polish city of Gdansk.

Combining naturalistic detail with fantastical images, the trilogy captured the German reaction to the rise of Nazism, the horrors of the war and the guilt that lingered after Adolf Hitler's defeat.

The book follows the life of a young boy in Danzig who is caught up in the political whirlwind of the Nazi rise to power and, in response, decides not to grow up. His toy drum becomes a symbol of his refusal.

The books return again and again to Danzig, where Grass was born on Oct. 16, 1927, the son of a grocer.

In the trilogy, Grass drew partly on his own experience of military service and his captivity as a prisoner of war held by the Americans until 1946.

"The Tin Drum" became an overnight success — a fact that Grass told The Associated Press in 2009 surprised him. Asked to reflect why the book became so popular, he noted that it tackles one of the most daunting periods of German history by focusing on the minutiae in the lives of ordinary people.

Then he quipped: "Perhaps because it's a good book."

Three decades after its release, in 1999, the Swedish Academy honored Grass with the Nobel Prize for literature, praising him for setting out to revive German literature after the Nazi era.

With "The Tin Drum," the Nobel Academy said, "it was as if German literature had been granted a new beginning after decades of linguistic and moral destruction."

"His writing had a great political significance, especially in the renaissance of Germany after the World War," 1991 Nobel laureate Nadine Gordimer told The Associated Press in 1999. "He never failed to confront Germans with what they did."

Grass untiringly warned his compatriots to remain vigilant against racism.

He was widely admired by his literary contemporaries but also controversial for his outspoken political stands, including his strong stance against German reunification after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

He never shed his fear that Germany could again stray into the dangerous ways that led to the terror that became World War II.

"It can't be that my children and grandchildren will have to suffer under the stigma of being German," he said after winning the Nobel Prize. "But these late-born children also have a share of the responsibility for ensuring that such things — even their stirrings — never happen in Germany again."

"His novels, stories and poems reflect the great hopes and mistakes, the fears and desires of entire generations," said German President Joachim Gauck on Monday, calling Grass' work "an impressive mirror of our country and a lasting part of its literary and artistic legacy."

But Grass' standing as a moral arbiter took a hit with his late revelation that he was called up for duty with the Waffen-SS in the closing months of the war.

Recalling the pull of Nazi propaganda, he said that when he was assigned to the 10th SS Panzer Division "Frundsberg" he found "nothing offensive" about the prospect.

Grass painted an unheroic picture of his service with the division, which fought Soviet troops in the last days of the war in eastern Germany. It ended with his capture by the Americans in May 1945 after a shrapnel wound left his arm so stiff he couldn't move it. His division was delayed getting into the fighting because it was waiting for tanks that never came.

In a letter written to the mayor of Gdansk amid calls for him to be stripped of his honorary Polish citizenship, the author insisted that he had needed time to reflect on how to deal with what he called "this episode from my young years that was brief, but which weighed on me heavily."

His belated apology appeared to have been accepted in Poland. In Gdansk, officials planned to set up a condolence book Monday. Lech Walesa, a fellow Nobel laureate, said he remembered Grass fondly, adding "he is well-liked in Gdansk."

Six years after admitting his SS service, Grass drew criticism from across the political spectrum for his sharp criticism of Israel in a poem that skirted any explicit mention of Iranian threats against the Jewish state.

"To put Israel and Iran morally on the same level is not intelligent, it is absurd," then-German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle said at the time.

A few days after the poem appeared, Grass insisted that he had meant to single out Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government, and not Israel as a whole. But that did little to quell the controversy.

Grass — the picture of the leftist intellectual with his pipe, gravelly voice, bushy mustache and slightly disheveled look — was active in Germany's political scene throughout his life and a longtime member of the center-left Social Democratic Party.

Grass' later literary works received decidedly mixed reviews at home and abroad, with many questioning whether he had lost his incisive ability to critically comment on the darker side of German history.

Candidates' security

FROM PAGE 1

all necessary measures have been taken to hold the elections in free and fair manner and the commission will not tolerate any irregularities.

He once again directed law enforcers to prevent harassment of candidates.

Abdus Salam, who attended the meeting on behalf of BNP-backed mayoral candidate Mirza Abbas, said, "We are in a state of panic. We want adequate security ... we demand deployment of army."

However, he did not go into details. Also yesterday, the High Court fixed that it will pass orders tomorrow on two bail petitions filed by Abbas in two vandalism and arson cases.

The court asked Attorney General Mahabub Alam to make sure that Abbas is not harassed or arrested in the two cases until the orders are passed.

It also directed the accused not to conduct any election campaign and not to talk to the media before getting the orders on his bail petitions.

At yesterday's meeting, mayoral candidate Dilip Bhadra said he has

received threats over phones. He did not say anything about the identities of the callers.

But talking to The Daily Star after the meeting, Bhadra alleged that it was ruling party men who have been threatening him as they think he might be an obstacle to the victory of AL-backed mayoral candidate.

Addressing the meet, mayoral aspirant Shaheen Khan said, "We are having difficulties in campaigning because of one particular party."

Mayoral aspirant Baharane Sultan Bahar urged the EC and law enforcers to ensure security of all candidates as many of them are being threatened and facing difficulties while conducting campaign.

Ismat Takir, a councillor aspirant of ward 5, alleged that criminals attacked him on Sunday during his campaign. Fearing such attacks again, he demanded adequate measures from the EC.

Over a dozen councillor aspirants, including Mansur Ali of ward 5, Nargis Mahatab of ward 6 (reserved) and Noor Jahan Begum of ward 7 (re-

served), also spoke on security concerns.

Mayoral candidates Saifuddin Ahmed, Abdur Rahman and Rezaul Karim Chowdhury demanded deployment of army while Sayeed Khokon said he feels it won't be necessary.

"Many candidates claim that I am enjoying government facilities. But I want to request those critics to make any remark based on specific allegation," Khokon, AL-backed mayoral hopeful, also said.

About army deployment, the CEC said the decision would be finalised on April 19 at a law and order meeting.

Four election commissioners, top officials of government and police attended yesterday's meet.

Over 18 lakh voters of DSCC are entitled to elect 57 general ward councillors and 19 reserved ward councillors on April 28.

Dhaka metropolitan magistrates yesterday fined five councillor aspirants Tk 40,000 for violation of electoral code of conduct, according to EC sources.

CITY ELECTION

HSC exams of Apr 26-28 rescheduled

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Tests of nine Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and its equivalent examinations, scheduled for April 26, 27 and 28, have been pushed back for the forthcoming city corporations polls slated for April 28.

The exams of April 26, 27 and 28 were rescheduled for May 2, 4 and 16, said an education ministry press release yesterday.

The HSC and its equivalent exams of April 26 will be held at 10:00am and 2:00pm on May 2, while the tests under Technical Education Board scheduled for April 27 will take place at 10:00am on May 4.

On the other hand, the exams slated for April 28 will be held at 10:00am and 2:00pm on May 16.

The exams under 10 education boards began across the country on April 1.