



People from religious and ethnic minority groups attending a rally organised by the Bangladesh Hindu-Bouddha-Christian Oikya Parishad at the historic Suhrawardy Udyan in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Ensure rights of minorities

FROM PAGE 1
Thousands of people from religious and ethnic minority groups joined the rally from different parts of the country, demanding equal rights and status.

Dhaka Metropolitan Police took additional security measures in and around the Udyan. Metal detectors were installed at different entry points while several CCTV cameras were installed in the rally venue to closely monitor the law and order situation.

Addressing the rally, ruling Awami League lawmaker Suranjit Sengupta said, "Even after a secular government has been in power for the last seven years, minority people have not been empowered."

He expressed frustration saying none from the minority groups could be made ministers in Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's cabinet.

Suranjit, who served as the rail

minister between 2009 and 2014, castigated the AL high command for nominating only nine municipality mayoral candidates from the minority groups out of 235 municipalities across the country.

The AL lawmaker said none from the minorities got licenses of TV channels, private universities, banks, medical colleges and insurance companies.

"Representation and empowerment of the minority people will have to be ensured proportionately while running the state. We will make no compromise to this end. We will wait six months and declare tougher programmes," he warned.

Bangladesh National Human Rights Commission Chairman Dr Mizanur Rahman blasted the government for not implementing the vested property return act and demanded the country be freed from the grip of bureaucracy to make human rights

sustainable.

He called upon the government to take legal actions against the land and property grabbers of the minority people irrespective of political affiliations.

Among others, Maj Gen (ret) CR Datta Bir Uttam and Ushaton Talukder MP addressed the rally.

DEMANDS OF THE MINORITY COMMUNITY

Rana Dasgupta, general secretary of the Parishad, placed the seven-point demand that included reservation of 20 percent of parliamentary seats, and appointments of minority people in all strata of the administration.

He also demanded formation of a national minority commission to ensure human rights of the religious and ethnic minority groups, full implementation of the CHT Peace Treaty, and enactment of minority protection act.

Stay out of polls or face action

FROM PAGE 1
"We will try to make them understand that if we cannot ensure win for our candidates in most of the municipalities, the BNP-led alliance may again unleash violence and carry out subversive activities in the name of anti-government movement," the former food minister told The Daily Star.

If any rebel refuses to comply with party instructions, the party will have no other choice but to expel him, he said.

Victory for party-nominated candidates is vital for invigorating grassroots activists and proving the ruling party's popularity, added Razzaque.

AL Organising Secretary Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury echoed his words.

The party high command's message would be conveyed to the rebel candidates, asking them to withdraw

nomination papers and work for party-endorsed candidates, said Khalid.

"If anyone does not abide by the instructions, disciplinary actions will be taken against them," he added.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif hoped the party would be able to sort out the issue of rebel candidates by December 13, the last date for withdrawal of nomination papers.

He was speaking at a press conference at the party chief's Dhanmondi office yesterday.

BNP insiders said the party would maintain a "go-slow strategy" until December 6, the last day for scrutiny of nomination papers, and move swiftly to settle the issue of its rebel candidates after the scrutiny.

"We fear returning officers may cancel the nominations of some of our party candidates over silly mistakes

during the December 5-6 scrutiny. In that case, we will have to extend party support to alternative candidates," said BNP Assistant Publicity Secretary Emran Saleh Prince, who is involved in the selection of the party's mayoral candidates.

Seeking anonymity, a senior BNP leader said the party has kept some "dummy candidates" in some places as part of its electoral strategy.

Upon completion of the security, party's senior leaders, including acting secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, will call the rebel candidates and send letters to convince them to withdraw candidature.

They will try to make the rebels understand that victory for the party-backed mayor aspirants is crucial for the BNP's existence and popularity, said the leader, adding that if any rebel does not pay heed to it, he will face disciplinary actions.

Small parties eye big polls

FROM PAGE 1
But most of the registered parties have declined to contest the upcoming municipality polls.

The three major parties -- the Awami League, the BNP and the Jatiya Party -- are interested in joining the local polls.

Of the other 10, all of which are small, only one or two may be able to bag a few number of mayoral posts with support from the BNP.

Some leaders of the small parties and political analysts have cited various reasons for the present situation. They say most of the small parties are based in the capital and run by central leaders who usually contest the national polls.

The parties do not have leaders and activists at grassroots level and that's why they feel a lack of interest in contesting the municipality elections, observe political analysts and leaders of the small parties.

They also blame use of black money and muscle power in electioneering for poor response from small parties in local government polls.

A good number of registered parties are either under the AL-led or the BNP-led alliance. But their poor strength cannot empower them to get the best deals.

The AL has decided to contest the polls alone, not under the banner of the 14-party alliance. Although the decision has made some of its alliance partners unhappy, the AL will not change its position, party sources said.

The BNP has decided to contest the polls under the banner of the 20-party alliance. But almost all of its partners, excepting Jamaat-e-Islami,

are parties in name only. The BNP will extend its support to Jamaat, Liberal Democratic Party and Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar) for a few mayoral posts, party insiders said.

The Jamiat-e-Ulama-e-Islam has sought BNP's support in three mayoral posts, the Bangladesh NAP in six, the Jatiya Gonotantrik Party in five and the Muslim League in one, said BNP and other party sources.

But the BNP will back only one mayoral candidate of the LDP and the JP. For Jamaat, the party may extend support to around 8 to 10 independent candidates, Emran Saleh Prince, an assistant publicity secretary of BNP, involved in the nomination process, told The Daily Star last night.

Other partners who have sought BNP's support may not get positive response due to their lack of popularity, they said.

Political scientist Prof Emajuddin Ahmed says activities of most of the small parties are limited to the capital city.

"So where will they get leaders to contest the local body elections?" he said.

Their central leaders cannot contest the local polls because of their status as politicians at the national level, he said.

Hafizuddin Khan, a former advisor to the caretaker government, echoes Prof Emajuddin.

"Even central leaders of many small parties do not have any support base in their localities as they limit their political activities to the capital city," he said.

Sharif Nurul Ambia, general secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, says different parts of the country were a

stronghold of the left-leaning parties but they have lost their influence due to many reasons.

Had they retained their influence, they could have nominated their candidates in those municipalities, he said.

The JSD, also a component of the AL-led 14-party alliance, is now preparing to nominate candidates in less than 50 municipalities, said Ambia.

The Workers Party, another component of the AL-led alliance, may nominate mayoral candidates in 15 municipalities, said Fazle Hossain Badsha, general secretary of the party.

Registered with the EC, Gonotantrik Party, a component of the AL-led 14-party alliance, however, has not yet sent any letter to the EC, expressing its interest to join the polls.

Contacted, Nurur Rahman Selim, presidium member of the party, said they hoped the EC would defer the polls.

Bangladesh Jatiya Party, a component of the BNP-led alliance, has decided not to contest the polls though it is a registered party.

Contacted, Andaleev Rahman Partho, president of BJP, said: "We are not so strong at grassroots levels. So, it would be very tough for us to win the polls."

Bangladesh Kalyan Party that had earlier sought BNP's support in 11 municipalities too has decided not to contest the election.

"Popularity of our aspirants is less than those of the BNP. So, we have given up for the interest of the 20-party alliance," Maj Gen (ret) Syed Mohammad Ibrahim, the party chief, told The Daily Star yesterday.

A living proof

FROM PAGE 1

during the 1971 Liberation War.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, she described such denial as "total lies", which is "disgraceful".

Accounts by witnesses, relatives and rape victims as well as historical records show many women became pregnant during the war and gave birth to war babies.

After independence, the rape victims were honoured with the title "Birangana" or war heroine.

Born into a cultural family, Ferdousi was associated with a cultural organisation, Sandeepon. She worked at the Crescent Jute Mills in Khulna when the war broke out.

She was the lone bread earner of her family after her parents separated. One of her brothers joined the war.

Like many other places, Khalishpur, where she used to live with her mother, younger brothers and sisters in Khulna town, turned turbulent with sporadic clashes between Bangalees and Biharis.

The riot between Bangalees and Biharis spread throughout the town on March 26, the day Bangladesh declared its independence. It turned serious in the next two days. At the end of the month, she along with her family members moved to her maternal uncle's house at Muslimpara in Khulna.

As the situation calmed down a bit, she returned to their Khalishpur house a few days later, only to see their home ransacked and looted. Yet, she started living there amid fear of destruction by the Pakistan army. At one point, her family members went to Jessore. But Ferdousi had to stay back in Khalishpur for her work so she could support the family.

She said she was threatened with consequences because one of her brothers joined the war. The Pakistan army and its local collaborators also threatened to implicate her in a murder case, as she witnessed the killing of one collaborator by some Bangalees.

In an interview with veteran journalist and war crimes researcher Shahriar Kabir in 1999, Ferdousi described how she was kept virtually imprisoned by the Pakistani forces and their collaborators in Khulna during the war. It was the first time she spoke in an interview of her trauma.

She witnessed how the Pakistani troops slaughtered innocent Bangalees by guillotine with jute cutters of the mill and narrated the horrific times of her life when she was violated repeatedly by the troops. She became pregnant, but had an abor-

tion.

"I had seen many deaths, heard about many incidents of women repression, but I never thought that I would also have to become the victim of such cruelty," she said in the interview which was published in 1999 in a book titled "Tormenting Seventy One: An account of Pakistan army's atrocities during Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971".

Ferdousi was taken to Jessore by the Pakistan army officers who violated her on the way and again at the billiard room at Jessore Cantonment before handing her over to another army officer. She named many top army officers who violated her. She was not spared even by junior officers.

"I told them, 'Please kill me. Don't torture me in this way.' But unfortunately it was not my fate to be killed by the Pakistanis. I was brutally tortured by both Colonel Khatak and Colonel Abed. Colonel Abdullah and Colonel Zafar also tortured me at Jessore Cantonment in the name of interrogation.

"My request, my tears, my resistance, my hatred -- nothing could stop the Pakistan army officers who held high ranks," she said.

Once she was taken to a concentration camp in Jessore where she heard the sound of beating people who were tortured there.

In the early days of the war, once she and her family heard sounds of massive firing coming from Munshibari, a neighbouring house, in Khalishpur. Looking through a window, they saw 15-16 people were being killed.

"I read many stories of repression by the Nazi soldiers, I also watched many films on the second World War, but all those incidents of repression faded in front of the brutality of the Pakistani forces I witnessed every day in 1971," she told the interview.

"Now, they are lying," she told this correspondent yesterday when approached for a comment over Pakistan's denial.

"I have named many officers [involved in the crime]. Should they be walking free? Shouldn't they be tried? ... They must be brought to book," said Ferdousi, also a vice-president of Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee, which champions the demand for war crimes trial.

"Why should we keep relations with a country that made us suffer so much and is still trying to do so? All relations, diplomatic or economic, should be severed [with Pakistan]," she said.

Indian Navy for monitoring Bangladeshi vessels

STAR REPORT

Indian Navy feels it necessary to ensure surveillance in the cargo vessels from Bangladesh as they pass through the Indian side of the Sunderbans and move upstream, reports The Hindu.

Having a strong monitoring system was essential to prevent another a Mumbai like attack, Naval Officer-in-Charge (West Bengal) Commodore Ravi Ahluwalia said while interacting with journalists in Kolkata on Thursday.

Owing to a recent accord between the two countries, a category of ships called River Sea Vessel (RSVs) are being used for India-Bangladesh coastal shipping and these RSVs do not have transponders on them, he said.

Asked whether he is hopeful of having such a surveillance system, he said that for protection of maritime interest such a facility should be there.

"It is a requirement [installation of transponders] which has been accepted and it will surely happen ... For protection of maritime interest, it has to be there. Otherwise you will see a Mumbai [happening] again," Cdre Ahluwalia said, referring to the 26/11 Mumbai attacks in which terrorists used the marine route to the city.

A number of Bangladeshi vessels, which enter the country from Hemnagar checkpoint and move upstream can be seen in the Hooghly.

Thai FM urges region to double-down on tackling migrant woes

AFP, Bangkok

Thailand's foreign minister yesterday urged regional nations to redouble efforts to tackle the causes of this year's Bay of Bengal migrant crisis, warning the issue "will not simply go away".

Delegations from across Southeast Asia met in Bangkok for talks over migration, six months after a belated Thai crackdown on human trafficking gangs saw thousands of migrants from Myanmar and Bangladesh abandoned at sea.

The summit came as boats crammed with migrants traditionally depart following the end of the monsoon season around November.



The injured policemen of Chuadanga Sadar Police Station. The cops, along with the Chuadanga SP and his two deputies, were roughed up allegedly by ruling party MP and parliament Whip Solaiman Haque Joarder Selun and his men inside the station yesterday, after the police refused to release two of his supporters arrested earlier.

PHOTO: STAR

Whip, his supporters swoop on cops

FROM PAGE 1

Khalid Hossain and Asad on Thursday evening on information that the two were planning to attack the house of a pro-AL Jubo League leader, who failed to get the party ticket in his mayoral bid in the municipal polls.

Khalid has at least five cases filed against him.

As the police team, led by Officer-in-Charge Saiful Islam, was heading towards Chuadanga Sadar Police Station with the arrestees, a group of BCL men led by Mohaimen Haque Joarder Anik intercepted the police van in Pouro area and demanded release of the two.

Anik is the general secretary of Chuadanga district BCL and a nephew of Selun.

When the OC refused to do so, they blasted several crude bombs in front of the vehicle and tried to snatch the arrestees in vain, police said.

Anik along with his men then followed the law enforcers to the police station and informed his Whip uncle over the phone.

Selun then phoned OC Saiful and asked him to release the arrestees.

"But I denied. Then he threatened me, saying, 'I will teach you a lesson'. He also hurled abuse at me," Saiful told The Daily Star.

Around 9:30pm, Selun and his younger brother Reazul Haque Joarder, who is the incumbent mayor of Chuadanga municipality, went to the police station.

They started shouting at the OC, using "offensive words" for arresting the BCL men and not releasing them.

"When I again humbly expressed my inability to comply, he charged at me with a slap gesture," the OC said.

Saiful then informed his superior officers and Additional SP Belayat rushed to the police station around 10:00pm.

Seeing him, Selun and his brother Reazul got even angrier and immediately started "abusing" the additional SP.

"I tried to calm them down, saying I would look into the matter. But they surrounded me and started throwing abusive words at me," Belayat told The Daily Star.

He then phoned his boss SP Rashidul Hassan, who arrived at the scene around 10:30pm.

"Selun and Reazul started misbehaving with the SP Sir as well. They asked him rudely, 'How dare you arrest my party men?' ... The Whip even attempted to hit the SP Sir," Belayat added.

Having failed to bend the policemen even after all these, Selun's men outside

resorted to violence.

They vandalised a police vehicle, pelted brickbats, hurled six to seven crude bombs and fired four shotgun bullets at the policemen there before they were chased away.

Four constables -- Tariq Hakim, Rubel Hossain, Abdul Quader and Md Ashraf -- were injured with shotgun pellets. They are under treatment at Chuadanga Sadar Hospital.

Contacted, SP Rashidul initially declined to comment on this.

But later, he said, "No one can expect such behaviour from a lawmaker, especially when the lawmaker is holding the post of a Whip in parliament."

"Necessary steps will be taken after investigation and on instructions from our higher authorities," he added.

MP Selun, however, has denied the allegations.

"They [police officials] did not even show me the respect I deserve as a sitting Whip of parliament," he said at a press conference at his residence in Chuadanga yesterday afternoon.

Selun has been involved with the AL since 1966. He was first elected a lawmaker in 2008 after four unsuccessful bids.

He became an MP from Chuadanga-1 again, this time uncontested, in January 5 elections last year.