

Govt turning country into 'security state'

Alleges Fakhru

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government wants to hold on to power, using law enforcers, BNP acting secretary general Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir yesterday said, accusing it of turning the country into a "security state".

People's rights have been snatched, he said, adding that no one, not even politicians and intellectuals, could exercise any right.

"Only the ruling party and its machinery are enjoying all rights."

At a programme of Jubo Jappa, youths' body of Jatiya Gonotantrik Party, Fakhru also said police now began to behave like kings since the government was using them in its interest.

The discussion was organised at the auditorium of the Photo Journalists Association in the capital's Purana Paltan to mark the 26th founding anniversary of the Gonotantrik Party.

The BNP leader there pointed to two recent incidents -- assault on a Bangladesh Bank official and on another of Dhaka South City Corporation by police.

While beating up the city corporation official, cops made an arrogant remark that hilsa is the king of fish while police the king of the state, Fakhru said, adding, "This is the country's real scenario now."

Without permission, the opposition party could not hold any meeting, not even inside any room, he alleged.

The BNP leader urged the government to shun its arrogant attitude and restore a democratic atmosphere in the country by holding a fair election through talks.

"People must wake up someday, and you won't find any way to suppress their spontaneous resistance," Fakhru warned the government.

Quoting newspaper reports, he said Tk 77,000 crore had been laundered during the last fiscal year and blamed it on ruling party men.

"There's no sector, from which the ruling party men are not siphoning off money and sending those abroad," Fakhru added.

Meanwhile, Dhaka city unit BNP has decided to hold a protest rally on Wednesday at the Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh, demanding the release of all BNP men, including its convenor Mirza Abbas, from jail.



Mother of Sabiha Akhter Sonali, right, in tears after the 14-year-old was run over and killed by a bus when she was crossing a street near Bangladesh Bar Council building yesterday morning.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Twin tragedies strike within eight hours

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'ALL IS LOST'

Sonali secured GPA-5 in JSC exams, said her poor father Zakir Hossain. His son studies diploma engineering at a polytechnic institute in Narsingdi and the monthly expenditure on their education had reached taka five to six thousand.

Sonali went out alone in the morning, said Zakir, a painter. Before leaving, she asked him to buy her new school dress, made of poplin fabric and white.

"Now I had to buy a white piece of cloth. It's not for her school dress; it's her shroud," he said, weeping, while talking to some reporters at the DMC morgue.

The family wanted a bright stu-

dent like Sonali to study science at a government institution at a low cost and become a doctor someday, he said.

In front of their Segunbagicha house, her mother Sharmin Akter said all their dreams have been shattered just in moments.

"We wanted her to be a doctor and serve the nation. Now all is lost," she said, weeping.

Just before the accident, Sonali was on the road island. As she took a couple of steps while trying to cross the road, the bus knocked her down. The rear wheels crushed her head, said Mala Begum, who saw the accident from a close distance.

Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of Shabbagh Police Station,

said the accident left her dead on the spot. After an autopsy at the DMC morgue, she was buried at Azimpur graveyard in the afternoon.

Following the accident, pedestrians and locals blocked the road, stretching from Matsya Bhaban to Shabbagh, for nearly an hour before dispersing, said the OC.

The bus was seized but its driver fled, he added.

THE LAST DAY OUT

Mitu, along with her sister Ayesha, nephew and brother-in-law Omar Faruq went for a day out yesterday to visit Shishu Park.

They enjoyed several rides there and took photos of each other, said Faruq. From the park, they headed to Shabbagh to have some food around

4:00pm.

"As we reached the intersection and tried to cross the street, a bus from Gulistan, bound from Gabtali via Elephant Road, hit her," he added.

She was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), only to be declared dead by doctors, said hospital sources.

"What will I tell her father now?" the brother-in-law said to himself at the hospital.

Talking to this newspaper, Faruq said Mitu had secured GPA-5 in the primary terminal exam this year.

The accident prompted locals to block roads for an hour. Police nabbed driver Shahin and seized the bus from the spot.

Lack of guideline leads to free-hike

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Secondary Girls' School and College, Shaheed Police Smriti School and College, Shaheed Bir Uttam Lt Anwar Girls' School and College, and Bangladesh Bank High School and College.

Similar move by 46 schools run by Chittagong City Corporation and the Navy School and College have also met with protests.

Guardians say the sudden fee hike will put most families, especially the middle income groups and those with multiple school-going kids, in immense pressure.

"Please, do write something so that we can continue our children's studies. Otherwise, we have to stop their education," said Asma Akter, whose four children study at the Willes school.

The tuition fee of the eldest, a ninth grader (English medium), has risen to Tk 3,100 from Tk 2,100 and of the two daughters, who study in Class-VII and Class-V (English version) to Tk 2,550 from Tk 1,500.

The monthly tuition fee of her youngest daughter, a second grader, has been hiked to Tk 1,500 from Tk 675.

"My husband runs a vulcanising shop and he is already struggling to meet the expenses of my children's education with his income. The sudden increase would cost us dearly," Asma told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Not all those who send their kids to this school are well-off. Many children from middle-class families study here as well.

"We have no one to share our pains. Where should we go? Should we stop sending our kids to school?" she said.

The guardians under the banner of Willes Little Flower School and College Obhhabok Forum have been protesting the fee hike since the first week of this month.

"The school authorities have increased the fees by 50 to 85 percent for different classes. Whenever we speak to the principal, he tells us to send our kids to some other schools, which is very insulting," Shamima Sultana Rexona, spokesperson for the forum, told The Daily Star.

When the school authorities increased the tuition fees in 2014, they

assured of not doing it for at least three years, she said.

"But they hiked the fees illogically," she said, adding that they would observe two-hour sit-ins from today until the school authorities cancel the fee hike.

Abul Hossain, principal of the school, said they needed to raise the fees. "We have to increase the salaries of the teachers and staff. They have threatened to go on strike otherwise."

Viqarunnisa school has increased the tuition fees from Tk 800 to Tk 1,500 for Class-I to Class-V, and from Tk 900 to Tk 1,700 for Class-VII to Class-IX.

Principal Sofia Khatun said they had no alternative but to do this.

"We have to pay the teachers who are not under the government's monthly pay order (MPO) facility. Besides, it is not possible to raise teachers' salaries without hiking the fees," she told reporters.

The fees for Class-II to Class-IX of Udayan school has been fixed at Tk 1,200 from Tk 800, and for Class-I at Tk 2,000 from Tk 1,000, according to guardians.

NO GUIDELINE ON TUITION FEE

"The schools are increasing the tuition fees since the government has not issued any specific guideline on it," said Ziaul Kabir Dulu, president of Obhhabok Oikya Forum, a national platform of guardians.

The government has an admission policy and all that it says about the fees is the capital-based Bangla medium schools, which enjoy MPO facilities partially, can charge a student highest Tk 8,000 as monthly fees, session charge and development fees during the admission.

Tk 10,000 is the ceiling for the English version schools.

The policy says nothing specifically on the monthly tuition fees.

"Taking advantage of this, the schools have hiked the fees," said Ziaul Kabir.

He said his forum has already submitted a memorandum to the education ministry, seeking inclusion of specific directives on the tuition fees in the admission policy.

"We will wage tougher movement and go to court if necessary," he added.

Educationist Rasheda K Choudhury

too criticised the fee rise.

She described the government pay scale excuse that the schools are showing to justify their decision as lame.

"The fee hike is not consistent with the rise in the pay scale."

"What the schools are simply doing is business and this is what worries us," said Rasheda, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education.

Prof Fahima Khatun, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), admitted the absence of specific guidelines on tuition fees.

"That does not mean that the schools will do whatever they wish... It cannot be allowed," she told The Daily Star.

On the steps the government was taking in this regard, Prof Fahima said the directorate has already investigated the allegations of fee hike at Willes school and issued a show-cause notice to the principal of the school.

"We've sent the report to the [education] ministry. It will now decide on the next course of action," she said.

Price cut

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profit in fiscal 2015-16.

Oil prices stood below \$30 per barrel for the first time in 12 years on Friday, but the government is still resolute about not adjusting the domestic prices so that the BPC "can make up for its past losses".

An official of the energy ministry said fuel prices fell in recent times on the global market, which means the BPC profit would soar.

From the start of 2014, the price of petroleum products started sliding in the international market. But the government has not adjusted the prices despite various quarters' call for price cuts.

According to a BPC report, in FY2013-14 the average import price of crude oil was \$109.6 per barrel and that of finished oil was \$125.27 per barrel. The prices were \$75.23 and \$90.16 respectively in FY2015-16.

In the current fiscal year, the price of crude oil slumped to \$30 a barrel. So the BPC's profit will increase further.

Behind this price fall on the global market is economics of supply and demand.

Over the last several years US domestic production has almost doubled. Saudi, Nigerian and Algerian oil that once was sold in the US market is suddenly competing for Asian markets. As a result, producers are compelled to cut prices. Canadian and Iraqi oil production and exports are also rising. Even the Russians, despite economic problems, keep pumping.

On the other hand, the economies of Europe and developing nations are weak and vehicles are becoming more energy-efficient. So demand for fuel is declining a little, contributing to the price fall.

But the BPC is not in favour of price cuts now as it incurred huge losses in the past, said the energy ministry official, asking not to be named.

Since 1977, when the BPC started operation, its accumulated losses stand at Tk 45,945 crore, according to the Corporation.

Considering this, the government gave it Tk 42,709 crore in "subsidy" between FY2006-07 and FY2013-14. Even in the last fiscal year, it was given Tk 600 crore despite making profits.

The money was given in loan, but the BPC never paid back.

A top official said the government gave the BPC almost the same amount of the loss it incurred. So there is no logic behind not adjusting local prices with the global prices.

On the other hand, the BPC had been making profits for the last two years. But it did not pay back the loan it had taken from state-owned banks through bonds.

According to state bank statistics, the BPC took Tk 10,974 crore in loan from Sonali, Janata and Agrani banks through bonds. Of this, Tk 5,416 crore was taken from Sonali Bank alone.

Against the bonds, the BPC gives the banks only five percent interest which is lower than the banks' cost of fund. The banks have taken a joint move to write a letter to the finance ministry so that either the money is returned or the interest rate is increased.

Sonali Bank Managing Director Pradip Dutta told The Daily Star that against the bonds they invested a huge amount of money at a low interest.

He said the three banks decided to take the matter to the finance ministry.

3 Qaeda suspects 'killed in Yemen drone strike'

AFP, Aden

A drone attack believed to have been carried out by US forces killed three suspected Al-Qaeda members travelling in a car in southeast Yemen, security and tribal sources said yesterday.

Tribesmen said a missile struck the vehicle in the Rafadh region of Shabwah province overnight, killing three.

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