

It must not harm environment

Banshkhali locals say on coal-fired power plant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

People of Gondamara in Banshkhali will support installation of a coal-based power plant there only if the plant does not harm the environment, said speakers at a view exchange meeting yesterday.

"If the plant does 20 percent harm but 80 percent good for people, then we want the power plant. But if it's the opposite, we do not want it," said Md Redoanul Haque, a member of Gondamara Union Parishad.

The Power Division and the upazila administration jointly organised the meeting with the local community at Banshkhali in Chittagong.

Speaking there, local lawmaker Mostafizur Rahman claimed the plant, if set up, would significantly improve the economic condition of the people in the area.

"After the plant is set up, Banshkhali would go ahead of all other upazilas of Chittagong district."

On April 4, four people were killed and 30 others injured in a clash between law enforcers and locals in Gondamara union in Banshkhali upazila of Chittagong over installation of the coal-based power plant.

Yesterday, the Awami League MP said, "The four were killed in firing by criminals, not by the police."

"A vested quarter was demanding removal of the Banshkhali upazila nirbahari officer (UNO) and the officer-in-charge of the local police sta-

tion. But it will only encourage the criminals."

It was the prime minister who proposed installation of the power plant at Gondamara, Mostafizur claimed. "I would have opposed the proposal if the plant had left any adverse impact on environment."

Additional Secretary Ahmed Kaikawsar of the Power Division said the April 4 incident occurred because "misleading information" about the power plant had been spread.

"Three paisas from the price of each unit of electricity would be kept for development of the local people. About Tk 34-35 crore would come this way every year," he added.

Director General Mohammad Hossain of the Power Cell of the power, energy and mineral resources ministry said though S Alam Group would set up the power plant, the government will constantly monitor it.

"The plant would be set up using all modern technologies ... All steps would be taken to rehabilitate and compensate the locals who would lose their land or houses," he said.

Arifullah, chairman of Gondamara UP, stressed the need for holding more such meetings to take opinions of the locals on installation of the plant.

Chittagong's Additional Deputy Commissioner Abdul Jalil, Banshkhali UNO Md Shamsuzzaman and Upazila Parishad Chairman Zahurul Islam, among others, spoke at the programme.

ZIA TRUST CASE

Court to hear Khaleda's statement on April 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A special court yesterday fixed April 25 to hear BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's statements in a corruption case tied to Zia Charitable Trust.

The Special Judge's Court-3 set up in the capital's Bakshibazar also rejected two petitions filed by the defence -- one for further cross examination of the investigation officer of the case and the other seeking case documents.

Both the petitions did not have any legal ground, the court said after Khaleda's counsels submitted them in her presence.

The court, however, granted them a time petition for moving their pleas to the High Court and set the date for hearing arguments.

On the day, it will also read out testimonies of the prosecution witnesses to Khaleda and hear her statements regarding them.

The BNP chief will be able to reply in writing or verbally, said Sanaullah Mia, one of her counsels.

Khaleda appeared in the court around 10:30am after leaders of the BNP and its associate organisations gathered at Bakshibazar intersection, several hundred yards off the special court.

The Anti-Corruption Commission filed the Zia Charitable Trust graft case in August 2011 with Tejaona Police Station, accusing four people, including the BNP chief, of abusing power in raising funds for the trust from unknown sources.

It also filed the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case in July 2008 with Ramna Police Station, saying that Khaleda, her eldest son Tarique Rahman, now living in the UK, and four others misappropriated more than Tk 2.10 crore that had come as grants from a foreign bank for orphans.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina along with senior Awami League leaders placing a wreath at Bangabandhu's portrait in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi in the capital on the occasion of the historic Mujibnagar Day yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Frustrated, AL's allies face split

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of the alliance.

But those in favour of quitting say the 14-party combine, formed to realise a 23-point programme to establish a democratic country free from communal politics and extremism, hold direct election for reserved women seats in parliament and ensure employment for at least one youth of each family, has already drifted far away from its goal.

Leftist parties apart, most leaders of the HM Ershad-led Jatiya Party support parting with Sheikh Hasina's government. JP's status in the government is very peculiar. In parliament, it is the main opposition (Ershad's wife is House opposition leader) party. But it also shares cabinet posts and the former dictator himself is PM's special envoy.

For his party's dual role, Ershad several times announced that his party would quit the government to play an active role as opposition. The call got louder when Ershad made his brother GM Quader his second-in-command early this year.

After a party meeting on January 31, Quader said JP decided to quit the cabinet as his party's position was not clear because of its double role.

The issue of severing links with the government resurfaced after the JSD placed a proposal to this end at its council on March 12. Party Standing Committee Member Mustak Hossain placed the proposal, saying it was losing its identity and popularity.

He added the 14-party components were only following government's decisions as they had no scope to be a part of the decision-taking process.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sharif

Nurul Ambia, president of a JSD faction, said it was a long overdue proposal and the issue was discussed in party forums several times.

"The proposal was also discussed at the council, but rejected ... Personally I think it is not yet the time to quit. But we failed to take pro-people stance due to our link with the government and we are losing our own identity," Ambia said.

The 14-party alliance came into being after the 11-party combine and the National Awami Party (NAP-Mozaffar) and the JSD joined hands with the AL.

The 11-party alliance was formed with Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Gano Forum, Workers Party, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (JSD-Khalekuzzaman), Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal (Mahub), Ganotantri Party, Bangladesh Samyabadi Dal (ML), Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal, Communist Kendra, Gano Azadi League and Ganotantrik Mazdur Party. However, most of the parties later left the coalition.

After forming the 14-party alliance, the AL took Ershad's JP in its fold, terming the combine a grand alliance.

The issue of breaking away from the alliance was first raised within the Workers Party. Haider Akbar Khan Rono, former politburo member of the party, protested his party's decision to run in the 2008 elections with AL's polls symbol "boat". He later resigned from the party.

The division within the Workers Party intensified centring on the issue before the formation of the Hasina-led polls-time government in 2013. Party President Rashed Khan Menon was offered a portfolio in that cabinet, but he could not take it in the face of

opposition from the party.

Later, party leaders, including Ragib Ashan Munna, Tusher Roy, Mojammel Haque Tara, left Workers Party, after deciding not to take part in the "one-sided" elections of January 5, 2014.

In 2013, Dilip Barua-led Samyabadi Dal discussed the issue. A group of leaders of the party then quit the party and formed another Samyabadi Dal. An initiative is now underway under the leadership of party central leader Harun Chowdhury to create new leadership within the party bypassing Dilip Barua.

Harun said that Samyabadi Dal was on the verge of extinction because of its ties with the government. "We could not take any pro-people stance as our general secretary is a minister."

He said the decision to join the alliance was suicidal.

The issue of parting with the alliance and the government was also discussed in Gonotantri Party. At a party meeting in August 2014, the then party presidium member and now general secretary Shahdat Hossain and another presidium member Mahfuzur Rahman raised their voice to quit the 14-party alliance and also the government.

Party Presidium Member Nurur Rahman Selim said the divisions still remained.

Workers Party politburo member Anisur Rahman Mollick said if the situation continued for long, smaller parties' existence would be at stake.

Contacted, AL Presidium Member Matia Chowdhury said divisions within any political party were not expected. "The divisions created among some political parties are not for ideological reasons."

MUJIBNAGAR DAY

Hasina pays homage to Bangabandhu

DHAKA, Bss

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday paid tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the occasion of the historic Mujibnagar Day.

She placed a wreath at Bangabandhu's portrait in front of Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at Dhanmondi in the capital in the morning.

Later, the PM stood there in solemn silence for some time as a mark of profound respect to the memories of Bangabandhu, the architect of Bangladesh's independence.

Flanked by central leaders of the Awami League, Hasina, also the party president, placed another wreath at the portrait of Bangabandhu on behalf of the AL.

On this day in 1971, Bangladesh's first government in exile was formed at the Baidyanathala Mango Grove in Meherpur, in the then Kushtia.

The place was later renamed Mujibnagar to show tributes to Bangabandhu who had been declared as the president of the government-in-exile.

Syed Nazrul Islam was made the acting president in the absence of Bangabandhu. Tajuddin Ahmad was made the first prime minister, while Captain M Mansur Ali and AHM Quamaruzzaman became cabinet members.

The successful leadership of the core cabinet steered the Liberation War to the victory on December 16 that year.

Tickets sold

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got it, but for a hefty price. He came back to Dhaka by Teesta Express.

Talking to The Daily Star, several passengers, including the banker, alleged that Jamalpur Railway Station has turned into a "den" of scalpers.

There is a "syndicate" comprised of some of the railway staff and locals which buys all the tickets, creating an "artificial crisis" of tickets and leaving passengers with no option but to get those from the black market.

"A few days ago, my brother went to the ticket counter and sought three tickets for two consecutive days [either for February 29 or March 1]. But he had to return empty handed," said Rebeka Sulatana, who was returning to Dhaka with her mother and son.

Finding no other way, the brother bought the tickets from the scalpers.

Showing this correspondent one of the tickets, she said, "See the ticket itself shows that the time of its sale was 13:36pm on February 29. It means the man inside the counter had lied that day."

"Black market ticket sale is quite common in Jamalpur. I used to return to Dhaka by train before but now I take a bus to avoid the trouble," said a local, Moshir Islam Monna who is a first year student at Bangladesh Institute of Marine Academy.

Recently, this correspondent also looked for two tickets to Dhaka on one of the counters at the station.

with white beard, who was sitting inside, said straight away that all the tickets had been sold five days ago.

The reporter then went to a nearby grocery shop and asked the grocer where he could get tickets.

The grocer showed him a place near the station where the correspondent met a man named Aynal who sold two double-seat tickets, worth Tk 320 and Tk 380, for Tk 600 and Tk 700.

Aynal claimed that he had bought the tickets for quite a high price from the railway employees at the station.

During the time of the conservation, many other scalpers were seen selling tickets to other passengers under the very nose of law enforcement agency members.

Contacted, Station Master Mohammad Tarique said locals could sell tickets on the black market but refuted the allegation that railway employees at the station were involved in the crime.

"Crisis [of tickets] takes place due to the sale of advance tickets. We've nothing to do with that," he said.

Additional Director General of Bangladesh Railway Habibur Rahman said they were not aware of such evil practice at any railway station.

"It is not our duty to catch those who sell tickets on the black market," he said, adding, "We will ask the local superintendent of police and the deputy commissioner to take action once we get any complaint [in this regard]."

Mahmudur to be shown arrested

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court for an order placing him on remand," the official told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

Mahmudur Rahman, a pro-BNP journalist and a former energy adviser, has been behind bars since April 2013.

The DB official also said the name of one Chittagong-based businessman, who now lives in the US, has also come up in their investigation, he added.

In the same case, senior journalist and a pro-BNP intellectual Shafiq Rehman is on a five-day remand following his arrest from his house in the capital on Saturday morning.

Regarding the arrest, Sajeeb Wazed Joy, also ICT adviser to the prime minister, in a Facebook post yesterday said, "The US Department of Justice discovered Shafiq Rehman's direct involvement in the plot to kidnap and kill me."

He also said, "They provided this evidence to our Government. He was arrested based on this evidence. I cannot disclose more, but the evidence is direct and irrefutable."

Meanwhile, Rehman's wife Taleya Rehman yesterday met two officials at British High Commission -- head of counsellor service Hasina Rahman and Emily Summers of political section to discuss her husband's situation.

Taleya Rehman, also executive director of Democracywatch, a non-government organisation promoting good governance and democracy, said the embassy officials told her that the British government is "seriously concerned" over the arrest of the 80-year-old journalist and writer.

"I have requested the UK embassy officials to ensure that Shafiq, as a UK citizen, is not harassed and the government does not violate his human rights."

In response, the officials assured her

that they would look into the welfare of Shafiq since he is also a UK citizen, she told The Daily Star at her Eskaton residence.

'ARREST ON SPECIFIC ALLEGATION' Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu at a press conference at the Press Information Department yesterday said Shafiq Rehman, Mahmudur Rahman and journalist leader Shawkat Mahmud were arrested on specific allegations, not for being journalists.

"The mass media is not under any pressure," Inu said.

Shawkat Mahmud was arrested on August 18, 2015 in an arson case filed on January 28 the same year.

Mahmudur Rahman was arrested on April 11, 2013 in cases including one over publishing a leaked Skype conversation between a war crimes tribunal judge and an expatriate Bangladeshi legal expert.

Also yesterday, Law Minister Anisul Huq said, "The matter is now under investigation. If he [Shafiq Rehman] is found innocent in the investigation, he will be released."

"But trial proceedings will go on if the allegation against him [Shafiq Rehman] is proved."

The minister was talking to reporters after inaugurating a training course at city's Judicial Administration Training Institute.

At another programme, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said two to three people from within Bangladesh were involved in the conspiracy to abduct and kill Joy.

He was addressing a discussion at Bilia Auditorium at Dhanmondi in the city, marking the historic Mujibnagar Day.

Asked about Shafiq Rehman's arrest, the home minister said, "You [journalists] know everything ... there was a plot to kidnap and kill our ICT adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy in the USA.

Those who were arrested there in connection with the plot had conversations with two to three people in Bangladesh. Shafiq Rehman might have link with them."

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam yesterday termed "inhuman" the remand of journalist Shafiq Rehman.

Talking to reporters after visiting Rehman's Eskaton residence in the city, he demanded that the journalist be released upon scrapping his remand.

Fakhru along with BNP Vice-Chairman Abdullah Al Noman and BNP Chairperson's Adviser Abdul Awal Minto went to Rehman's house around 2:00pm and talked to Taleya.

"False charges are being brought against those who oppose the government and hold divergent views. They're being harassed and arrested in one way or the other. It can't be accepted putting a veteran journalist like Shafiq Rehman on remand," he said.

Fakhru and Taleya had a brief one-on-one meeting.

'UNFOLLOW IMRAN'

Joy in the Facebook post also came down hard on Imran H Sarker, the spokesperson of Gonojagoron Mancha, terming him "liar and opportunist".

"I expected the BNP to try to lie about this. However, I am surprised at Imran Sarker. Perhaps he has finally exposed his true face. It looks like he has become like most of our civil society, another opportunist and a liar. Maybe the BNP paid him off. Who knows. Either way, I have lost all respect for him. He needs to retract his statement and apologise to our Government."

He added, "I urge all my friends and fans who follow him to unfollow/unfriend him on Facebook. He is speaking on behalf of a criminal who tried to kill me."

Imran in a Facebook post on Saturday night condemned the arrest and remand of Shafiq Rehman and said arrest of a veteran journalist on hollow allegation is frustrating.

He, however, said he doesn't subscribe to Rehman's political view.

Last night, asked for his reaction to Joy's comment, Imran said it's unexpected.

"It seems while trying to defend one's freedom of speech, my freedom of speech is now at stake," he told The Daily Star around 10:30pm.

THE CASE

Masrurur Rahman Khaled, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch (south), told this correspondent that they were investigating the charges of attempts to abduct and murder Joy, who lives in the US.

"He [Rehman] has been arrested since his involvement was found," he added.

The case was filed by DB Inspector Fazlur Rahman with Paltan Police Station in August last year.

In the case, police mentioned the name of Mohammad Ullah Mamun, vice-president of BNP's cultural wing Jasas, as a conspirator.

The case statement says Mamun and some top leaders of the BNP and its allies met in the UK, the US and in the capital's Paltan and other parts of the country before September 2012 and conspired to abduct and kill the PM's son.

In March last year, Mamun's son Rizve Ahmed Caesar was convicted by a US court for bribing an FBI special agent to collect information regarding a Bangladeshi political figure.

The US Justice Department did not name the figure, but it is thought that it was Joy.

In a Facebook post on March 9 last year, Joy accused BNP leaders of conspiring to abduct and kill him.