

POLLS-TIME GOVT BNP to ask PM to hold dialogue

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP is going to submit a proposal for election-time government to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina soon urging her to take initiatives to hold a dialogue to that end.

Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said this while briefing journalists at BNP's Naya Paltan headquarters following a joint meeting of the party.

The BNP senior leader said they would not urge President Abdul Hamid this time to take steps to hold talks on the election-time supportive government for what Fakhrul said was the president's "mistake" over constituting the new Election Commission.

"People are now talking about an election-time government as they strongly believe a free, fair and inclusive parliamentary election will not be possible unless a non-party election-time administration is in place," Fakhrul observed.

"People think an election-time supportive government is a must for a fair and impartial election."

He added, "We will definitely place

a proposal for election-time supportive government urging the premier to take measures to sit with the political parties."

He went on: "We will send our proposal to the honourable prime minister with a request to accept it. Otherwise, she will have to take all responsibilities for any unexpected situation."

In reply to a question, Fakhrul said they were not thinking about going to President Abdul Hamid with any proposal.

"There is no meaning to go to the president as he has already committed mistakes in forming the Election Commission. What will be the use of going to the president?" he asked.

Criticising new Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda, Fakhrul said he is not a capable person for the post. "He is not that much qualified to be the chief election commissioner."

Asked, Fakhrul said BNP would decide later whether the party would join the next general elections under the new EC. He however said BNP would take part in local polls.



The Chaktai canal in Chittagong city has lost much of its depth and normal flow of water due to regular waste dumping and encroachment. In this photo taken on Tuesday, boats wait for tide so that they can sail along.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Chhatra League man shot inside AL MP's office

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Bangladesh Chhatra League leader was shot inside the political office of ruling Awami League lawmaker Golam Dastagir Gazi in Dhaka's Purana Paltan yesterday.

Injured Mosharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, 22, was admitted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital around 7:30pm, said Sub-Inspector Bachhu Mia, camp in-charge of the hospital police outpost.

Mosharraf is the vice-president of the pro-Awami League student body's Bhulta union unit of Narayanganj's Ruppangij.

One Masud Rana Ashique of

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'Criminal' killed in 'gunfight' with cops

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

An alleged criminal was killed in a "gunfight" between his cohorts and law enforcers in Munshiganj town early yesterday.

The dead is Shahjalal Miji, 33, of Dakkhin Courtgaon area in the town. He stood accused in at least 22 cases filed with different police stations of the district, said police.

Jayedul Alam, superintendent of Munshiganj police, said Shahjalal was arrested in Dakkhin Courtgaon area around 5:00pm on Sunday.

Based on information gleaned from Shahjalal, a team of the Detective Branch of police and local police was going to Baikhar area in the town to recover firearms, said police.

Shahjalal was with the law enforcers. When they reached Parulpara

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No VAT from students

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"The amount of VAT may look small, but it was an extra burden for the middle-class families like us given the rising expenses of education," she added.

Faisal Rahman, the father of a grade-III student of Maple Leaf School, said imposition of VAT on the tuition fees was absolutely discriminatory against the English medium students as no such tax was levied on the students of Bangla medium schools.

"The Supreme Court order will end the discrimination now," he said.

Yasmeen Habib, vice principal of Sunnydale School in Dhanmondi, said the students of English medium schools are also the children of Bangladesh and they deserve same opportunity as Bangla medium students get.

"I think," she said, "the Supreme Court ruling will put an end to the discrepancy. We welcome it."

The government in fiscal year 2007-08 imposed 4.5 percent VAT on fees and services of English medium schools. In the budget for 2014-15,

the rate was raised to 7.5 percent.

The value-added tax, also known as consumption tax, is the biggest source of government revenue, followed by income tax. It accounted for 36 percent of the revenue collection in fiscal 2015-16, according to NBR.

The NBR got Tk 55 crore as VAT from these schools in 2015-16 while the amount was Tk 49 crore in the previous year. In 2013-14, the figure was Tk 32 crore, according to NBR data.

Under the existing law, there is no VAT on Bangla medium schools and the government-approved English version schools that follow English textbooks published by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board.

In the budget of 2015-16, the government decided to impose 7.5 percent VAT on tuition fees of private universities and medical colleges but it had to backtrack from the decision following massive student protests in September 2015.

At that time, some guardians and students of English medium schools also staged demonstration in Dhaka. And two guardians filed a writ petition

seeking cancellation of the VAT.

Following the writ petition, the HC on September 17, 2015 stayed for six months the collection of VAT from the English medium students and issued a rule asking the government to explain why the imposition of VAT should not be declared illegal.

After final hearing on the petition, the HC on December 12 last year declared the imposition of VAT illegal and directed the authorities concerned to stop collecting VAT from January this year.

The HC delivered the verdict on the ground that VAT on English medium education is discriminatory since no VAT was imposed on fees of other institutions, and such discrimination is a violation of Article 17 of the constitution.

Following a stay petition filed by the NBR, the SC on January 3 stayed the HC verdict and also asked the NBR to file a leave to appeal petition by January 29 against the HC judgment.

There are around 180 registered English medium schools in the country.

After heavy defeat, a lot to ponder

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unleashed themselves after lunch.

You cannot exactly call it a despicable performance either since they did show some grit in certain sessions. On Day 3, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mehedi Hasan Miraz mustered the courage to bat through the entire session after tea. Miraz scored a good-looking half-century and Mushfiqur's 127 was quite flawless.

But then again, these performances make you wonder as to what the result of the Test could have been had at least one of their top order batsmen joined the party.

If they had, then Bangladesh would not have had the herculean task of

saving seven wickets on the final day against a top-class attack.

It was bound to be a difficult task and it was. In only the third over of the day, Shakib Al Hasan received a sharp turner as a delivery landed on the footmarks and he could only manage to dab it to the close-in fielder.

Mushfiqur Rahim joined Mahmudullah Riyad and they were looking good until Mushfiqur surprised everyone by getting out against the run of play.

In an attempt to disrupt Ravichandran Ashwin's line and length he regularly went down the track against him. He hit him for a four in the third ball and then attempted to

do the same in the very next ball of the 53rd over. He only managed to loop an easy catch to the mid-off fielder.

Losing their key batsman was a big blow. But Sabbir Rahman and Mahmudullah Riyad put in a half-century stand to help the visitors recover and get them past lunch.

After lunch however the ball started turning a bit more and also kept a bit low on occasion. Ishant Sharma, who was steaming in, trapped Sabbir in front in the 71st over and then got rid of Mahmudullah Riyad with a bouncer.

Riyad, who was looking good until then, had made his way to 64 before top-edging the bouncer to fine-leg.

Once Riyad got out, it was only a

At least 10 killed

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people had died in the explosion, while some 60 other wounded people had been rushed to city hospitals, in figures confirmed by hospital sources.

"The blast was so powerful. I saw the injured and bodies, saw flames surrounding the blast site, people were crying," witness Muhammad Tariq told AFP.

The incident occurred as hundreds of chemists protested a new law near the Punjab provincial assembly building, Rana Sanaullah, the provincial law minister, told AFP.

"We fear many injured," he said.

Lahore, the country's cultural capital, suffered one of Pakistan's deadliest attacks during 2016, a Taliban suicide bomb in a park on Easter that killed more than 70, including many children.

But blasts have generally been rare in the teeming city in recent years, as casualties from extremist attacks in Pakistan dropped significantly in 2015 and 2016.

No group immediately claimed

yesterday's explosion, but the same faction of the Pakistani Taliban responsible for the Easter blast recently vowed it would continue carrying out attacks.

Social media users were quick to suggest the blast was meant to derail plans to hold the highly-anticipated final of the Pakistan Super League in Lahore.

The second year of the Twenty20 tournament is currently being held in the United Arab Emirates out of security fears, but after a military crackdown on extremism officials were confident enough to plan for the final to take place in the cricket-mad city.

Dhaka, Delhi

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of the Bangladesh prime minister will be on top of the agenda," said a diplomatic source in Dhaka about the Indian foreign secretary's trip.

A number of high-level officials will visit Dhaka in the coming weeks before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina goes to New Delhi, sources said.

Adele wins

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Beyonce, whom she bested for top honors.

The English balladeer swept up the trio of major prizes at the music industry's biggest night -- Album, Record and Song of the Year -- along with two other pop awards. Beyonce walked away with two trophies.

And in a sentimental homage to late rock icon David Bowie, his final album "Blackstar" earned five awards, including four posthumous prizes for the singer.

Adele, who has stood by her winning style of heart-wrenching songs of loss and regret, became the first act ever to sweep the three key categories in two different years.

She won Record of the Year, which recognizes overall song, and Song of the Year, which looks at songwriting, for her ubiquitous hit "Hello" and Album of the Year for "25."

Adele made a similar sweep in 2012 with her last album "21" -- which remains the only album to have outsold "25" in the past decade.

Fighting back tears, Adele took the podium and paid tribute to Beyonce, who had led the night's nominations with nine for her politically edgy "Lemonade."

"My idol is Queen Bey and I adore you. You move my soul every day," Adele said as she looked at Beyonce, who was making her first public appearance since announcing she was pregnant with twins.

She hailed Beyonce's album as "monumental and so well thought out, and so beautiful and soul-baring," suggesting it should have won, bringing her rival to tears.

Speaking to reporters after the show, Adele said she had been worried "25" would flop: "I didn't really find my voice, and I don't know if I did find it even at the end."

It was a happy ending to a night that included a major embarrassment as Adele -- using an expletive that was cut from the television broadcast -- insisted on restarting "Fastlove," her tribute to late pop icon George Michael.

It was the second straight year of hiccups for Adele after a microphone fell on the piano during her Grammy performance a year ago.

Shortly afterwards on Sunday, Metallica frontman James Hetfield discovered that his microphone was off as the band played with Lady Gaga -- who transformed into a metalhead, dancing ferociously before stage-diving.

Snapshot of reality

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of Claudius II, Rome was involved in many bloody campaigns. Claudius was having a difficult time getting soldiers to join his military. The reason, he believed, was that men were reluctant to leave their loved ones or families. So the mighty emperor cancelled all marriages and engagements as the only way out.

St Valentine stood against the regime. He secretly helped couples marry, and for this kind act he was condemned to be clubbed to death and to have his head cut off. He was executed on February 14, around the year 270 AD.

If all this is true, St Valentine is a martyr, a rebel. But let it not cross the mind of the couples roaming around the TSC area on February 14 for it might put a dampener on their jolly mood.

Why bother with history?

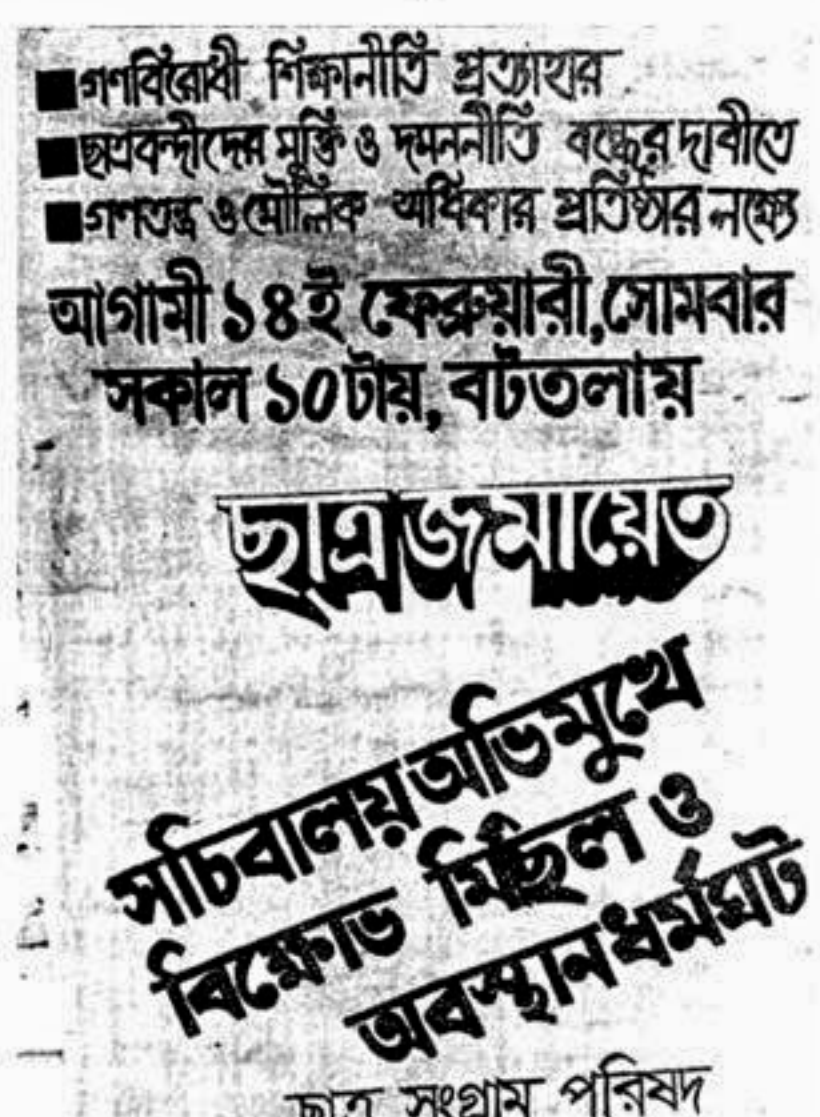
It makes our lives complicated as we already have a lot to deal with at present.

So we no longer remember Jafar, Dipali Saha, Zainal, Mozammel, Ayub Kanchan and others who were shot to death during a massive student protest against the education policy of Ershad regime on February 14, 1983.

This was probably the first martyrdom in the anti-autocracy movement of the 80s.

On February 28 the next year, law enforcers ran a truck over a peaceful procession. Two student leaders -- Selim and Delwar -- were crushed to death.

We also forgot Raufun Basunia, who laid down his life on February 13, 1985



A poster for an anti-Ershad rally on February 14, 1983. PHOTO: COLLECTED

for the same cause. (Needless to say, the month of February occupies a crucial place in our pro-democracy movement.)

Finally, following the supreme sacrifices of many others like Dr Milton (November 27, 1990) and Noor Hossain (November 10, 1987), dictator Ershad was ousted in 1990.

This was how we achieved democracy. At the cost of lives.

But hardly anyone now recalls Jafar, Dipali and other martyrs on February 14.

And lest we forget, Ershad still roams the political arena.

We are a democracy after all.

Trump to unveil new measures

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The issue is sure to come up when Trump meets with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who said after the Republican leader issued his ban that America's northern neighbour welcomes with open arms "those fleeing persecution, terror and war."

While the fate of Trump's restrictions on refugees and travellers from seven Muslim-majority countries plays out in the courts, a separate executive order prioritizing the deportation of undocumented migrants paved the way for the arrest of hundreds of people, many of them Latinos, this past week.

As thousands of Mexicans protested Sunday against Trump's vow to make the country pay for his "big, beautiful border wall," the White House confirmed the president's plans to weigh new action to speed up deportations of illegal immigrants.

"As a result of the president's order, greatly expanded and more vigorous immigration enforcement activities are taking place," Miller said of the deportation decree.

Earlier, Trump tweeted: "The crack-down on illegal criminals is merely the keeping of my campaign promise. Gang members, drug dealers & others are being removed!"

Over the past week, the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency rounded up undocumented individuals living in Atlanta, Austin, Chicago, Los Angeles,

New York and other cities in what it called "routine" operations.

ROBUST

But Miller indicated Sunday that the raids were made more robust under Trump's January 25 executive order prioritizing deportation of undocumented individuals convicted of or "charged with any criminal offense," including misdemeanours.

"It is true that Operation Cross Check is something that happens every year. But this year we have taken new and greater steps to remove criminal aliens from our communities," Miller said.

The large-scale raids began in 2011 under then president Barack Obama.

Many Democrats have called on the government to act in moderation, fearful that people without a criminal record will find themselves swept up.

The case of a mother in Phoenix, Arizona who was expelled to Mexico on Thursday crystallized such worries, even among some Republicans.

"There is a lot of worry here in Arizona by those who... are illegally here but they have not committed aggravated felonies," said Arizona Republican Senator Jeff Flake, adding that the only hope for permanent change lies in major Congressional reform.

NEW ACTIONS

Miller insisted in interviews Sunday that the president has the power to keep some people from entering the

country.

The order that Trump issued abruptly in late January aimed to halt resettlement of all refugees for 120 days and that of Syrian refugees indefinitely.

It also barred for 90 days the entry of nationals from seven predominantly Muslim countries.

The ban was supposed to be in place while the government comes up with a new system of so-called "extreme vetting" of people seeking entry visas.

This could include checks on their social media accounts, according to John Kelly, the secretary of homeland security.

But a federal judge in Seattle issued a stay against the order on February 3. A three-judge appeals panel in San Francisco then voted unanimously against reinstating Trump's ban.

The idea of the White House issuing a modified immigration order that would survive scrutiny in the courts does not convince Democrats, who from the outset have charged that Trump's decree is simply anti-Muslim and plays into the hands of extremists.

"It will be used as a recruitment (tool) for terrorist organizations. It will put Americans at greater risk travelling abroad," said Democratic Senator Ben Cardin.