

# Khaleda embarks on mission unity

Bringing back 'reformist' leaders of 2007

RASHIDUL HASAN

In a bid to strengthen the party ahead of the next general election, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has launched a major initiative to take back some former leaders and to make some others politically active again.

The move comes nearly 13 years after the party's founding secretary general AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury floated "Bikalpadhara Bangladesh" in 2004.

As part of her move, the BNP chief on Friday night had a meeting with two "reformist" leaders, Zahiruddin Swapan and Sardar Sakhawat Husain Bakul, who were considered as promising and bright leaders.

For the first time since 1991, the BNP is neither in government nor in opposition now as it boycotted the general election on January 5, 2014. Some senior leaders said the party did not have such a hard time since the restoration of democracy in the country in 1990.

The BNP-led 20-party alliance's anti-government movement failed after the 2014 parliamentary election. Moreover, the party earned a bad name at home and abroad for violence dur-

ing the movement that claimed lives of over 100 people.

The party high-ups are now desperate to win the 2019 general election.

"The party chief's latest initiative to take back the reformist leaders is part of BNP's move to unite the party to make it stronger," a BNP standing committee member told The Daily Star, asking not to be named.

During the Friday's closed-door meeting with Swapan and Bakul at her Gulshan office, Khaleda categorically said she wanted to unite and make the party strong like it was during the 1991 general election, a meeting source said.

"I want to see a strong BNP like it was in 1991. I am taking an initiative to end all divisions in the party," the source quoted Khaleda as saying. She asked Swapan and Bakul to be active in party activities.

Talking to this correspondent on Friday night, Bakul said: "Madam told us that there was no alternative to uniting the party to confront the present government's oppression and misuse."

"She also instructed us to mobilise public opinion in our respective areas

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A bent electricity pole and a knocked over fence post on the median strip of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue. A bus recently ran into the median strip at night and hit the pole but it was not fixed. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# Living in fear

11 Ahmadiyya families in Kushtia ostracised

AMANUR AMAN, from Kushtia

Eleven Ahmadiyya Muslim families at Moheshkhola village in the district's Mirpur upazila have been living in insecurity after some local religious fundamentalists ostracised them.

Around 56 members of the families feared attacks from the fanatics who want them to be declared non-Muslims.

Fundamentalists asked villagers not to mix with the Ahmadiyyas. Local shopkeepers have been asked not to sell products to them, alleged Ahmadiyyas.

Zealots were trying to evict the

Ahmadiyyas from their own land.

Sabuj Hossain Khaled, a leader of the Ahmadiyya community, said the fundamentalists declared them ostracised in a religious meeting (Islami Jalsha) on February 20.

He alleged that bigots took four Ahmadiyyas to the meeting and forced them to announce that they did not belong to the community anymore.

Children of the Ahmadiyya families cannot go to schools for fear of attacks. Many men have stopped going to fields for farming.

"We are living in a miserable condition," said Mouhyia Khatun, an

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# Transport strike for killer driver

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expressed his anger.

"It has become a practice over the years that road transport workers enforce strike to pressurise the government and keep people hostage for materialising their illogical demands.

"Because of this, we saw in the past that authorities concerned in many cases did not take action against culprit road transport workers. But such practice should end and the government should not hesitate to enforce laws strictly," said Kanchan, who himself lost his wife in a road accident in 1993.

Even yesterday, a medical student who was travelling with her mother was killed after a reckless bus hit their CNG-run auto-rickshaw from behind in the capital's Bangshal.

The strike, which begins in 10 districts in Khulna division at 6:00am, has been called in protest of a Manikganj court verdict that sentenced the bus driver to life in prison.

After the verdict was pronounced, Jamir, the convict, claimed innocence and said he "did not kill any body" and he "just manoeuvred his vehicle to the left".

"The strike will continue until we get assurance from the government that we will get justice," said Abdur Rahim Box Dudu, senior vice president of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers' Federation.

"All the transport workers are aggrieved and we have no other option other than going for the strike," he said, adding that "no one is supposed to get more than a five-year-imprisonment for road accident".

The decision of enforcing the strike was taken in a meeting at the federation's regional office in Jessore yesterday, reports our correspondent there.

On February 22, Manikganj Additional District and Sessions Court pronounced the verdict in presence of Jamir, 50, holding him guilty for "reckless driving and negligence" that led to the deaths of the five, including noted filmmaker Tareque Masud and media personality Ashfaque Munier Mishuk.

The accident happened on the Dhaka-Aricha highway at Joka under Ghor upazila of Manikganj on August 13, 2011. Tareque Masud, Ashfaque Munier Mishuk popularly known as Mishuk Munier, and their film production crew -- Wasim, Jamal and microbus driver

Mostafizur Rahman -- were on their way in a microbus to meet the deputy commissioner in the district.

Road accidents with heavy casualties are common in Bangladesh but the drivers responsible in most of the cases escape trial. Though the drivers are punished in a few cases, awarding life imprisonment is rare, said experts working on road accident-related issues.

Reckless driving, run-down and unfit vehicles, modifying body structure of vehicles, establishing roadside kitchen markets, operating unauthorised three-wheelers on highways, operating vehicles by unlicensed drivers, among other issues, are mainly to blame.

At least 14 people were killed in road accidents in different districts yesterday, report to our correspondents.

# Reckless driving on, so is death

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The two were rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where Sadia died of her wounds at 7:30am. Her mother Shahin Sultana suffered minor injuries.

This was not the only tragedy of the day. A mother and her son were killed in another road crash in Tangail. Six people were killed in two accidents in Cox's Bazar.

Sadia's ward final test was scheduled for Thursday but it got deferred to yesterday. She planned to go home after the test, and since it was postponed and she had a ticket, she had left for Rajshahi that day.

A medical student hardly gets any time to go home. Sadia was always excited about going home, said Nazmul, a friend of hers.

"Today, we are going to her home as she lies silent," said Nazmul, who was going to Rajshahi with the body.

Sadia, a student of N-19 batch, was the quiet and smiling kind, said her mates in her hostel, where she stayed for three years.

She toiled for five years. Her dream was almost within reach as she was to become a doctor next year. She had already finished two of the three professional exams, said her batch mate Nayem Ishraq Prince.

Sahin, an assistant professor at a



Students of Dhaka National Medical College gather in front of the college, protesting the death of Sadia Hasan, a final-year student, yesterday.

college in Rajshahi, and Sadia had arrived in Dhaka on a train from Horagram of Rajshahi yesterday. Her father Hasanuzzaman is a retired banker. She has a brother who is an engineer.

Sadia got into the medical college in 2012.

PROTEST

After the news of her death spread, the

students of the college took to the street and blocked the Roy Saheb Bazar intersection.

They held a rally and issued a 24-hour ultimatum to the authorities concerned for the arrest of the culprit driver. They demanded his stern punishment.

"If we don't see any significant development, we will go for stronger

demonstrations," said a protester.

Asked, Mohammad Ibrahim Khan, deputy commissioner (Lalbagh Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said they checked the CCTV footage of the area and tracked the bus.

He hoped that they would be able to catch the culprit soon.

After the rally, protesters said reckless driving was taking lives. "We lost our friend. We can't let it go. The culprits must be punished," one of them said.

"We have seen the verdict last week on Tareque Masud and Munier Mishuk killing, but it is unfortunate that we saw protests against the verdict," one of them said.

If they go unpunished, the killing on roads would go on, the protesters said.

They called for a protest campaign on social media #justiceforsadia.

Mohammad Abul Bashar, principal of the college, said the college expressed solidarity with the protest and that they would decide on their next course of action after discussion in the managing board.

According to a government study, at least 64 people die on the roads of Bangladesh every day.

The Daily Star received reports of 15 people killed on the roads yesterday.

# Grim finding

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depressive disorder in Bangladesh.

In the region, Timor-Leste has the lowest rate of depressive disorder with 3 percent, while India has the highest with 4.5 percent.

The study titled "Depression and Other Common Mental Disorders: Global Health Estimates" published on Thursday says globally 322 million people (4.3 percent of the world's population) are estimated to suffer from depression.

And 264 million suffer from anxiety disorders.

Globally, women suffer from mental disorders more than men, the report says.

"The number of persons with common mental disorders globally is going up, particularly in lower-income countries, because the population is growing and more people are living to the age when depression and anxiety most commonly occurs," the report says.

Depressive disorders are characterised by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness and poor concentration. It substantially impairs individual's ability to function at work or school or cope with daily life. At its most severe, depression can lead to suicide, it says.

On the other hand, anxiety disorders refer to a group of mental disorders characterised by feelings of anxiety and fear, panic disorder, phobias, social anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.

Although depression can and does affect people of all ages, from all walks of life, the risk of becoming depressed is increased by poverty, unemployment, life events such as the death of a loved one or a relationship break-up, physical illness and problems caused by alcohol and drug use.

Explaining the issues, Dr Sultana Algin, associate professor of psychiatry at the Bangladesh Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU), said depression is said to be the second highest factor to cause medical illness of all sorts by 2030.

Common mental disorders occur for two major factors: genetic and environmental. Besides, she added, physical sickness like stroke or typhoid also contributes to mental disorders.

Social, economic and familial issues are the other factors behind depression or anxiety disorders, Sultana told this correspondent.

Loss of spouse causes mental disorders in the Western countries in most cases, but in countries like Bangladesh, loss of children leads to such disorders. Problems of children often cause depression among the parents.

Financial crisis, especially when

women feel they cannot earn or can't spend as they want, leads to depression. On the other hand, lack of jobs, low salary, lack of promotion in job and professional conflicts are some of the common factors leading to depression.

"In our country, often males, who take all responsibilities of the family, face mental disorders," Sultana said. Too much expectation of the parents from their children is to blame for depression among kids, she added.

Depression is ranked by WHO as the single largest contributor to global disability while anxiety disorders are ranked 6th.

In Bangladesh, depression contributes to 7.1 percent of all years lived with disability.

Depression is also the major contributor to suicide deaths, with close to 8 lakh per year globally, the WHO said.

COUNTRY	Percentage of Population	
	DEPRESSIVE DISORDER	ANXIETY DISORDER
Bangladesh	4.1	4.4
Bhutan	4.2	3.7
Democratic People's Republic of Korea	3.7	3.7
India	4.5	3.0
Indonesia	3.7	3.3
Maldives	3.7	3.3
Myanmar	3.7	3.3
Nepal	3.2	3.6
Sri Lanka	4.1	3.4
Thailand	4.4	3.5
Timor-Leste	3.0	2.9

WAYS FORWARD?

Sultana said people in the developing countries like Bangladesh think one suffers from mental illness only when one is a mad, which is totally wrong.

Therefore, overall awareness on mental illness is important. A subject on mental wellbeing can be included in school curriculum, she added.

As preventive measures, Sultana said, the authorities need to have policies in place that create jobs, especially because youths constitute a huge portion of the country's population.

Familial bondage, sharing burdens and responsibility, social cohesion and removal of negative thoughts can largely help reduce mental disorders like depression and anxiety disorders, she said.

Sultana suggested a diet plan of having foods like banana, nuts, dates, broccoli, avocado and spinach can improve level of serotonin, a chemical in nerve system that goes down while in depression.

# Trump White House bars top media outlets

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media, the White House Friday excluded some outlets that have provided critical coverage from an off-camera event that replaced the traditional on-camera daily briefing.

Friendly conservative outlets like Fox News, the One America News Network and Breitbart News were allowed to attend, while the BBC, The Los Angeles Times and others were excluded.

Trump on Friday decried the media as the "enemy of the people," a day after his top strategist promised relations with the press will get "worse every day."

A number of news outlets that regularly cover the White House as part of the "pool," including newswires Reuters and Bloomberg, attended the briefing.

The Associated Press boycotted in protest. AFP protested being excluded, despite being in the "pool," and attended the briefing uninvited.

The White House Correspondents Association said it was "protesting

strongly" against the White House decision, and promised to bring it up with White House staff.

During the off-camera briefing spokesman Sean Spicer said that the White House has shown an "abundance of accessibility... making ourselves, our team and our briefing room more accessible than probably any previous administration."

It is not uncommon for Republican and Democratic administrations to brief select reporters, but the event was initially billed as a regular briefing open to credentialed media.

CNN anchor Jake Tapper decried the move as "un-American."

"This is an unacceptable development by the Trump White House," CNN's communications department wrote on Twitter.

"Apparently this is how they retaliate when you report facts they don't like. We'll keep reporting regardless."

The New York Times wrote in an editorial that the exclusion was an "unmistakable insult to democratic ideals."

Several outlets referred to a December interview in which Spicer told Politico that the Trump White House would never ban a news outlet. "Conservative, liberal or otherwise, I think that's what makes a democracy a democracy versus a dictatorship," he said.

Media organisations were not alone in defending the free press.

"Trump is supposed to be a public servant, and the truth is a public good," said Robert Reich, a UC Berkeley economist, former labour secretary and a prominent Democratic figure.

"But he continues to lie incessantly, and punish media that call him out," Reich wrote on Facebook. "These are the sort of antics we'd expect from a two-bit dictator but not from the President of the United States."

John Dean, the White House counsel for Republican president Richard Nixon in the 1970s, described the Trump media bashing as "more Nixonian than Nixon."

Nixon blasted the media as "the

enemy" behind closed doors, Dean, 78, told the Democracy Now! radio show on Friday.

"The big difference is, Trump is doing this right out" and challenging the US constitution's first amendment that guarantees freedom of speech and of the press. He described it as "very startling and very troubling."

"Nixon failed, and he had a deep reservoir of ill will to draw on when he got himself in real trouble. And I think Trump is creating the same problem for himself."

Trump's hostility towards the press "may be the greatest threat to democracy in my lifetime," said William McRaven, a retired admiral and Navy SEAL who oversaw the raid that killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in 2011.

McRaven made the remarks at the college of communication at the University of Texas at Austin, according to the student newspaper. McRaven became head of the UT system after retiring in 2014.