

Govt mounting pressure on CJ

Says BNP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the government was putting pressure on the chief justice over the Supreme Court verdict that scrapped the 16th amendment to the constitution.

The party also expressed concern over media reports that ruling Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader had a meeting with Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha at the latter's residence on Saturday night.

"You [the government] are mounting pressure on the chief justice; you are saying publicly to change the verdict," said Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the BNP.

Speaking at a milad mahfil organised by Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters, the BNP leader said, "We don't know what the Supreme Court's Appellate Division will do and what the chief justice will do. People of Bangladesh will not accept your [government] unjust acts."

Regarding media reports on Quader's meeting, Fakhrul said, "After

the working committee meeting of the Awami League, Mr Quader went to the chief justice's house."

Mentioning that AL leaders criticised the chief justice, he said, "We are sorry, ashamed and shocked ... what sort of conspiracy is hatching again to destroy democracy?"

The BNP leader urged the government and the ruling party men not to put any pressure on the judiciary. "Come to the right path. Don't destroy the institutions of democracy."

Fakhrul also called upon BNP leaders and activists to unite to put up strong resistance against the current "autocratic regime".

In another programme, BNP Standing Committee Member Moudud Ahmed said the government has declared a war against the SC verdict on the 16th amendment to the constitution.

He also demanded resignation of Law Commission Chairman Justice ABM Khairul Haque, also a former chief

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Army personnel getting on a raft as they head towards the Dinajpur Town Protection Dyke to repair it at Mahmudpara. The photo was taken around 4:30pm yesterday.

Dream shattered

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starved and locked in a room for several days at times.

Finally, her presence of mind helped her escape what she termed "a nightmare": She tricked a woman of the house into giving her the WiFi password.

She contacted one of her cousins in Jessore via instant messenger of her phone. The cousin then informed local human rights activist Abdur Rahman, who conveyed the matter to ASK.

As ASK contacted authorities to arrange her return, the Arab family started torturing her. After a few days, she was moved to another house where she met two other Bangladeshi women who were also subjected to the same treatment. One of them had been there for nine months without pay and had no hope of coming back to the country.

The three Bangladeshi women were taken to another house where they met six women from Sri Lanka and the Philippines.

"They used to beat up us Bangladeshis

at regular intervals. As I screamed for help one day, they tied me up and kept hitting me. I requested a Sri Lankan woman to take a picture of me being tied up and send it to Abdur Rahman," she said.

A few days later, they were taken to another house where the inhuman treatment continued.

ASK eventually wrote to Bangladesh Embassy in Saudi Arabia and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for rescuing her and the two other Bangladeshi women.

As the authorities arranged their return, the overseas employment agency forced Fatema to testify in written that she was well in Saudi Arabia, her employer was nice and that she had no objection against anyone, said the grieving woman.

Fatema and another woman returned home Saturday night, but the fate of the other victim is not known.

Sheepa Hafiza, executive director of ASK, said it was possible to rescue Fatema for her courage and intelligence.

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"The water levels of Jamuna and Meghna have already crossed the danger level. The Ganges is also swelling. The situation might worsen if downpours continue in the upstream," said hydrologist Prof Ainun Nishat.

"The situation can even get worse than what happened in the last 30 years," he added.

However, the FFWC says though the water level of the Jamuna (Brahmaputra in India) is increasing very fast, it's not very alarming yet as the Ganges is flowing two metres below the danger mark.

"Things get the worst when the water levels in all the three basins cross the danger mark simultaneously as in 1988," Sazzad Hossain, executive engineer of FFWC, said yesterday.

"Currently, the water level of Jamuna is increasing very fast and it will continue to rise over the next three days, but I think the situation will start improving after that," he added.

In most of the affected areas, people

are facing flood for the second time this season and in some areas of north-eastern region for the third time.

Road and rail communications have got snapped in many places. Import and export at Burimari and Akhaura land ports were suspended yesterday as the offices concerned were flooded.

Most of the areas in northern districts, including Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Rangpur, Jamalpur, Bogra and Sunamganj, were inundated. The situation in Thakurgaon was improving as water started receding.

The Department of Disaster Management said so far 1,28,759 families were affected in 351 flood-hit unions. It opened 562 flood shelters where already 4,950 families took refuge.

The army was called in after the town protection dyke of Dinajpur was washed away yesterday morning following incessant rains for the last 48 hours. Besides, around 5,000,00 peo-

ple remained marooned while around 7,000 clay houses reportedly collapsed in the district.

The river Purnarbhaba was flowing 0.74mm above danger level, according to the officials of Water Development Board in Dinajpur.

The flood situation in Lalmonirhat worsened yesterday as the Teesta, Dharla and eight other rivers were flowing above the danger level.

As roads and rail tracks went under water, the road communications between Lalmonirhat and Burimari and train operations on Lalmonirhat-Burimari and Lalmonirhat-Teesta routes have remained suspended since yesterday morning.

Houses and crop fields in Dimla and Jaldhaka upazilas in Nilphamari went under about six-foot water as thousands moved to the Teesta embankment and schools and colleges.

People are suffering in the lack of food and drinking water.

Two unions in Sherpur Sadar and

Nakla upazilas have been flooded by hill water and rains. Two schools announced closures as their buildings got submerged.

The flood situation in Sunamganj haor belt worsened yesterday as moderate rains and water flow from hills across the border raised water levels.

Abu Siddiqur Rahman, executive engineer of Water Development Board in Sunamganj, said the water level at different points of the Surma crossed the danger mark.

The Cholti, Patli and Jadukata rivers were flowing close to the danger mark.

Meanwhile, fodder crisis is forcing farmers to sell their cattle at much lower prices. More than 18,000 hectares of cropland were flooded in Sunamganj in the last two days.

Flood situation in Habiganj remained unchanged yesterday.

[Our Moulvibazar, Lalmonirhat, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Kurigram and Jamalpur correspondents contributed to this report]

AL, allies

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the 14-party spokesperson, came up with the alliance's stance on the verdict after a meeting with the allies. Samyabadi Dal General Secretary Dilip Barua chaired the meeting held at the AL president's Dhanmondi office yesterday afternoon.

Passed in 2014, the 16th amendment restored parliament's powers to remove SC judges for misconduct or incapacity.

The High Court last year declared the amendment "illegal", which was upheld by the SC on July 3 this year. The apex court released the full verdict on August 1.

Since then, the ruling AL has been criticising the verdict, while the BNP has been praising its observations.

Talking to reporters after yesterday's meeting, Nasim, also health minister and AL presidium member, said people would never accept the observations regarding Bangabandhu and the Liberation War and demanded reconsideration of the verdict.

"We are aggrieved by the judgment," he added.

Dilip Barua said the verdict had undermined the Jatiya Sangsad. "I don't know where the chief justice was during the Liberation War. He had showed audacity as he has no knowledge of the Liberation War. He has given the BNP-Jamaat alliance an opportunity to hatch conspiracy ...," he observed.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JDS-faction) President Hasanul Haq Inu termed the verdict's observations "extrajudicial", "irrelevant", "ill-motivated" and "biased" and said they had never expected such observations.

"The observations have undermined the Liberation War and Bangabandhu and those who are welcoming the verdict are acutely polluting politics," he said.

Inu, who also holds the information

portfolio, said the verdict was not acceptable and demanded annulment of the observations and review of the verdict.

Workers Party General Secretary Fazley Hossain Badsha demanded a review of the verdict, while Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) General Secretary Sheikh Shahidul Islam said the entire nation was aggrieved by the verdict.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif rejected the verdict terming it "anti-constitutional".

"This verdict has given a scope to the BNP to do dirty politics and encouraged the anti-liberation forces," he observed.

QUADERTO MEET CJ AGAIN

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said he would meet Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha again to discuss the observations made in the 16th amendment verdict.

"I had a long meeting with the chief justice. I will do the same again, as discussion with him is not over yet," said Quader, also road transport and bridges minister.

He was addressing a programme marking Sheikh Kamal's birth anniversary in the city.

The minister said he went to the chief justice's residence on Saturday night and talked about the observations in the verdict.

"My party's stance over the observations has been conveyed to the chief justice. I don't want to make any comment before the discussion is over," he said, adding that people would know about it all at an appropriate time.

The meeting between Quader and the chief justice lasted over two hours. It took place at a time when several ministers and ruling party leaders have been criticising the Supreme Court verdict that scrapped the 16th amendment to the constitution.

Cattle hotels!

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of the Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge, farmers started taking the cows directly to different parts of the country including the capital," he added.

Govinda Ghosh, a sexagenarian of Govindashi village, said he has been seeing people selling household necessities by the river since he was a child.

Villagers started selling cows and goats there during the 70s and the market grew over the years, drawing attention of traders, he said.

"When a lot of people kept arriving with cows and some of them had to stay overnight, they asked the villagers' permission to keep the cows in their yards and sometimes gave them some money for the favour.

"The villagers soon realised the business potentials and started what they call hotels," he said.

Villages where the business spilled over include Khanurbari, Bhalkutia, Kukadair, Routbari, Jigatala, Bagbari, Sthalkashi, Matikata and Chituliapara.

Lawyers' groups hold counter-demos

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resignation and arrest of Law Commission Chairman Justice ABM Khairul Haque for "breaching the code of conduct" by holding a press conference on the SC verdict.

At the Awami Ainjibi Parishad's meeting, its Convener Yusuf Hossain Humayun said they rejected the observation that "No nation, no country is made of or by one person".

Its Joint Convener Abdul Baset Majumder said there is no room for the judgment to stand, as it has insulted Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

"I call upon the Supreme Court to amend the verdict immediately through a suo moto move," he said.

Lawyer Abdul Matin Khasru demanded expunction of the "unexpected" remarks on Bangabandhu before the SC goes on vacation on August 25.

He claimed the verdict contains "derogatory and irrelevant" comments about the Jatiya Sangsad and the Election Commission.

The CJ's comments in the verdict are irrelevant to the main issue of the case,

added Khasru, also an AL lawmaker.

AL Law Affairs Secretary SM Rezaul Karim said the comments on Bangabandhu have to be withdrawn through a suo moto move.

The nation can't understand why the SC declared legal the provision formulated by a martial law regime and why it declared illegal the law made by parliament, he added.

Pro-AL counsels Nurul Islam Sujan and Fazilatuuensa Bappy also spoke at the rally.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rezaul said lawyers held rallies at 64 of the 73 bar associations across the country with the demand for expunction of the "irrelevant" observations in the verdict.

At the same time, the JAF held a rally at the SCBA, demanding resignation and arrest of Khairul.

Mahbub Uddin Khokon, secretary general of the JAF, said Khairul should be arrested and tried at "Gono Adalat" for making derogatory remarks about the SC verdict.

Contacted, he said JAF leaders and members held protest programmes at 55 bar associations across the country

yesterday.

Awami Ainjibi Parishad held a rally also at Dhaka Bar Association and brought out a procession, protesting "the derogatory remarks" on Bangabandhu in the judgment.

Parishad leaders criticised the role of Chief Justice SK Sinha and urged him to step down immediately.

Lawyers Abdullah Abu, Kazi Nazibullah Hiru and Taposh Kumar Paul, among others, spoke there.

On the other hand, leaders and activists of pro-BNP forum JAF held a rally at the Dhaka bar, demanding immediate removal of Khairul for making "derogatory comments" on the SC judgment.

Lawyers Masud Ahmed Talukder, Abdullah Mahmud Hassan and Sanaullah Mia, among others, spoke there.

They also brought out a procession on the court premises.

Our Narayanjanj Correspondent reports: tension prevailed on the district court premises as both pro-AL and pro-BNP lawyers staged demonstrations.

No untoward incident took place

there.

Tangail district unit of Awami Ainjibi Parishad staged a demonstration on the court premises, demanding expunction of "unnecessary" observations in the SC verdict.

At the same time, JAF leaders and activists brought out a procession there, welcoming the SC verdict and demanding removal of the Law Commission chairman.

Later, they tried to stage a demonstration but police barred them.

In Chittagong, pro-AL lawyers held a rally on the district court premises, protesting the "irrelevant" remarks in the SC verdict.

Earlier, they had brought out a procession.

On the other hand, the JAF organised a rally in the court area, demanding immediate arrest and removal of Khairul.

Our Kurigram correspondent adds: pro-AL lawyers staged demonstrations on the district judge's court premises around 1:00pm.

However, pro-BNP lawyers didn't hold any protest programme on the court premises.

Govt to seek review

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Asked if distorting history would be considered as misconduct, the minister said, "There is no definition of misconduct [for distorting history]. So this has to be checked to see if there has been misconduct or anything else. There is scope for that."

Replying to another query as to who now holds the authority to remove judges over misconduct, he said, "Ultimately, the authority lies with the president. If there is no 16th amendment or any mention of the Supreme Judicial Council in the constitution, there is no one but the president [to handle the matter]."

About the movement and counter-movement by the two factions of Supreme Court lawyers, he said, "These incidents are not expected. It was not expected, too, that some untoward words will come in the judgment and it will distort history."

He said that under the law everyone had the right to protest a verdict if it did not obstruct the court proceedings.

"I said the post of the chief justice was an institution and this institution was not person-centric. We all, the general people, should be careful about this institution. I think emotion

is running high, but it will settle down."

Criticisms from lawmakers and cabinet members have engulfed the apex court since it scrapped the 16th amendment to the constitution.

In its full verdict on August 1, the apex court said the provision of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) for the removal of SC judges for misconduct or incapacity has been reinstated in the constitution.

Replying to a question about this, the law minister said two former chief justices told him that there was a debate about the automatic restoration of the provision of the SJC.

He also claimed there was no constitutional vacuum in the country at the moment.

Asked about the criticism against the chief justice by several ministers, Anisul said the ministers also needed to be respectful to the judiciary.

"The posts of the chief justice, the speaker, the prime minister and the president are institutions and we should all be respectful to these posts," he added.

About the dinner of Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader with the CJ on Saturday night, the law

minister said discussions among the judiciary, the legislative and the executive organs could be held for the sake of the country and its people. Such discussion would continue for the development of the country.

"There might be misunderstanding while moving forward. But those need to be settled for the interest of the country."

ABOUT ARTICLE 57
Anisul said the fate of article 57 of the ICT Act would be decided within a month as to whether it would remain or not.

Pointing out that cyber crime is on the rise in the country, he said such crimes needed to be checked through a law. The government has taken an initiative to enact a new law "Digital Security Act" where article 57 will be inserted taking journalists' objections into consideration.

He said there would be categories of punishment in the proposed law which were absent in the existing ICT Act. "For small crimes, punishment will be small and for big crimes, punishment will be big."

He said the provision was needed to help check cyber crimes and not to hamper "real journalism" at all.

"Don't consider article 57 as an article about journalists' offences ... article 57 won't put journalists into trouble at all. As it's not clear now, it's being misused. Now no one will be able to file a case easily under article 57 as some changes have already been brought in its procedures," he added.

Asked about the progress in the investigation into journalist couple Sagar-Runi murder case, Anisul urged the journalist community to be patient as the "probe is on and it will be completed".

About bringing back the killers of Bangabandhu, he said discussions were going on with the US and Canada to bring back two identified killers.

About the August 21 grenade attack case, he said the case was now at the final stage and it would end very soon.

About the recent comments of Finance Minister AMA Muhith on the 9th wage board for journalists, the law minister said he would talk to the finance minister and the information minister over the issue soon.

DRU President Shakhawat Hossain Badsha and General Secretary Mursalin Nomani also spoke. Law Secretary Abu Saleh Sk Md Zahurul Haque was present at the programme.