

The curtain falls on Dhaka Folk Fest

Artistes from Iran, Mali, India and from home mesmerise audience

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The third edition of the Dhaka International Folk Festival came to a close with enthralling performances by artistes from Iran, Mali, India, Bangladesh and a surprise performance by the Danish ambassador to Dhaka.

The highlight was Iranian folk band Rastak, whose energetic display of contemporary folk took the audience by a pleasant surprise. Armed with a wide variety of traditional instruments and dressed in bright-colored outfits, the group danced, jumped and sang their hearts out to give the audience a memorable experience.

Seasoned folk artistes Shah Alam Sarkar and Aleya Begum staged a traditional Pala performance. They spoke about the Shariat and Marfati mystic schools of thought in a musical question-and-answer form. Their repertoire included "Akash Ta Kapchilo Ken", "Manush Roton Koro Bhojon" and "Dubey Dekh Rup Sagorey".

Shahnaz Beli came to the stage next, and got the crowd on their feet with

popular folk songs like "ChatokSwobhab Na Hole", "AgunLagaiyaDilo Kone", "KonMistori Nao Banaise" and "Korimona".

Danish Ambassador Mikael HemnitiWinther along with French pianist Frank Hergott and Australian Deputy High Commissioner Sally-Anne Vincentpaid tribute to Tom Petty with "Mary Jane's Last Dance", "Learning to Fly" and also performed Bob Marley's "No Woman, No Cry".The ambassador himself wrote "Seeing Dhaka", his tribute to the city.

The stadium was not as crowded as previous nights.

Grammy-winning folk band Tinariwen was the closing act of the festival, bringing the moods and melodies from the Sahara desert to a land faraway. Dressed in traditional white garbs complete with headgears, their calm, composed performance was melancholy and soul-searching.

Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, Sun Communications Chairman Anjan Chowdhury and eminent singer Nashid Kamal closed the event.



Iranian folk troupe Rastak brings a burst of energy to the Folk Fest on its closing day yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Forced to quit: BNP

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letter to the Bangabhaban from abroad yesterday, a day after his 39-day leave expired.

AL presidium member Abdul Matin Khasru said the BNP's allegation was "hypothetical" as the resignation was the CJ's personal decision.

"The country's judiciary and judges are fully independent. There was no pressure on the chief justice from the government over the resignation," Khasru, also a former law minister, told The Daily Star.

"The chief justice was scheduled to go into retirement on January 31 next year. We don't know why he stepped down before completing his tenure. It's absolutely his own decision and it is the right person to answer why he quit."

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said the CJ might have resigned considering his health.

About the BNP's allegation, the AL leader said the party was "doing politics" over the resignation. "Leaders of BNP are resorting to falsehood and it is nothing new. The BNP's poli-

tics is based on falsehood. I would like to request BNP leaders not to do politics over this issue."

Meanwhile, BNP standing committee member Moudud Ahmed yesterday said the CJ's resignation was a disgraceful incident for the judiciary and the court's independence.

He was speaking at a discussion at the Jatiya Press Club, reports UNB.

Jatiyatabadi Sangskritik Dal hosted the programme, marking the "National Revolution and Solidarity Day".

Moudud, also a former law minister, said the government "took action against the chief justice as the 16th amendment verdict went against it".

"Being aggrieved by the apex court's verdict, they did it. The government could have filed a review petition against the verdict, but they harmed the judiciary by carrying out personal attacks against Justice Sinha in a coordinated way," he added.

Another BNP standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain said, "We also heard that he [chief justice] went to Singapore for

returning home, but he couldn't. We're very concerned about the matter."

He said the government was "scared that the CJ might declare elections of 154 MPs elected unopposed illegal. And that's why the CJ was forced to quit".

SC UNDER GOVT CONTROL: SCBA

Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Zainul Abedin yesterday said the CJ's post fell vacant following the resignation of Justice Sinha.

"Such a vacuum in the chief justice's post had never been created in the past," he said at a press conference at the SCBA president's office in the afternoon.

Zainul, also a BNP leader, said, "Justice Sinha on several occasions had observed that the government had brought the lower courts under its control. His observation has been proved to be true following today's incident [of his resignation]. The government has taken the country's highest court under its control."

He said the CJ had to "quit amid many allegations" following the Supreme Court verdict in the 16th

amendment case and he was "forced to resign".

"We the lawyers have confusion about who is going to be the next chief justice in such a situation, although Justice Md Abdul Wahhab Miah, the senior most judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, is carrying out the duties of the chief justice," he said.

BNP'S ALLEGATIONS 'UNREALISTIC'

Addressing a press briefing at his Gulshan home yesterday, Law Minister Anisul Huq said Justice Sinha went abroad and sent his resignation letter from there.

About BNP's allegation that the government forced the CJ to quit, the minister said those who want to fish in troubled waters were brining such allegations.

"I will just tell them that waters are very transparent and there is no scope for catching fish there."

"The allegation against the government of forcing him [Justice Sinha] to step down is unrealistic."

Anisul also said he was stunned as CJ had said he was not sick although he took leave on health grounds.

Tensions soar

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In his shock announcement, Hariri accused Iran and its Lebanese ally Hezbollah of taking over his country and destabilising the broader region, saying he feared for his life.

His statement prompted fears that Lebanon -- dominated by rival camps led by Hariri and Hezbollah -- would be caught up in spiralling tensions between Riyadh and Tehran.

Hariri's week-long absence from Lebanon has sparked rumours that the former prime minister -- who also holds Saudi nationality -- is under de facto house arrest in the kingdom.

"The head of the Lebanese government is detained in Saudi Arabia, he is banned from returning to Lebanon until now," Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah said in a televised address Friday.

Members of Hariri's own Al-Moustaqbal (Future) party said they had no information on his fate.

And Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil announced on Friday that he was launching a "diplomatic campaign to bring back the head of our government of his own free will."

Even world powers have appealed for calm and freedom of movement for

Hariri.

The United States yesterday urged all states and parties to respect Lebanon's sovereignty following the power vacuum created by the prime minister's sudden resignation.

"The United States calls upon all states and parties to respect Lebanon's sovereignty, independence, and constitutional processes," White House press secretary Sarah Sanders said in a statement.

The United States considers Hariri a "trusted partner," it said, and "firmly reiterates that the Lebanese Armed Forces and other Lebanese state security forces are the only legitimate security authorities in Lebanon."

"In this sensitive time, the United States also rejects any efforts by militias within Lebanon or by any foreign forces to threaten Lebanon's stability, undermine Lebanese government institutions, or use Lebanon as a base from which to threaten others in the region," it added.

The White House statement echoed an appeal issued Friday by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who is traveling in Asia with President Donald Trump. Tillerson warned other countries against using Lebanon for proxy conflicts.

Chief justice steps down

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responsibility of the chief justice, under Article 97 of the constitution until a new chief justice is appointed.

Article 97 sates, "If the office of the chief justice becomes vacant, or if the president is satisfied that the chief justice is, on account of absence, illness, or any other cause, unable to perform the functions of his office, those functions shall, until some other person has entered upon that office, or until the chief justice has resumed his duties, as the case may be, be performed by the next most senior Judge of the Appellate Division."

Contacted yesterday, Attorney General Mahbubul Alam said there is no provision of dismissing the resignation letter.

Justice Sinha left Singapore for Canada on Friday to see his ailing daughter when his 39-day leave on "health grounds" expired, said a close aide to him. He flew to Singapore from Australia for treatment on November 6.

He went on leave from October 3.

On October 12, a gazette notification issued by the law ministry said Justice Wahhab will carry out the duties of the chief justice till November 10 or until Sinha rejoins office.

Justice Sinha left for Australia the following night, months before the date of his retirement on January 31.

Just before leaving the capital, he said he was not sick, contradicting the government's claim that he went on leave on health grounds earlier this month.

"I'm not sick. I'm not fleeing. I'll come back. I'm a little embarrassed. I'm the guardian of the judiciary. I'm leaving for a brief period in the interest of the judiciary, and so that the judiciary is not polluted," he told reporters.

"I've no antipathy to anybody. It's my firm belief that the government has been misled. This is my statement [the written statement]. I won't say anything more."

In a written statement, he said, "I'm fully well, but the way a political quarter, lawyers, and especially some honourable ministers of the government and the honourable prime

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ON AUGUST 1, 2017: The full text of the SC verdict was released with some critical observation on governance, political culture and parliament.

ON AUGUST 7, 2017: Some senior ministers at cabinet meeting expressed strong disagreement with the SC over the restoration of Supreme Judicial Council for removal of SC judges on grounds of gross misconduct or incapacity.

AUGUST 9, 2017: Food Minister Qamrul Islam if the chief justice doesn't step down by this month, lawyers would launch a vigorous movement next month to remove him.

AUGUST 18, 2017: Liberation Wars Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Huq Chief Justice SK Sinha has breached his oath of office by making unnecessary and irrelevant observations on the verdict and, therefore, lost the right to continue as chief justice.

ON AUGUST 22, 2017: Barrister Sheikh Fazle Noor Taposh, member secretary of Bangabandhu Awami Ainjibi Parishad, demanded resignation of Chief Justice SK Sinha and scrapping of the SC verdict and threatened of a movement otherwise.

ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2017: Parliament unanimously passed a resolution for taking "proper" legal steps towards cancellation of the 16th amendment verdict and expunction of the chief justice's "unconstitutional, objectionable and irrelevant" observations in the verdict.

ON OCTOBER 2, 2017: Law Minister said the CJ will go on a month's leave from October 3 on health grounds.

ON OCTOBER 13, 2017: Justice Sinha said he was not sick as he left the country for Australia.

ON OCTOBER 14, 2017: SC in a statement said Justice Sinha was facing 11 charges including "graft and money laundering".

NOVEMBER 11, 2017: CJ Sinha resigned from his office.

minister are criticising me recently over a verdict made me embarrassed."

Some people within the government have wrongly interpreted the verdict in the 16th amendment case

and then presented it to the prime minister, making her upset, he said.

Sinha said he was a "bit worried about the independence of the judiciary".

"Because citing the senior most judge [of the Supreme Court] who is now acting as the chief justice, the law minister yesterday [on October 12] said that the judge acting as the chief justice will bring changes to the Supreme Court administration soon."

He further said, "There is no precedence of interference in the administration of the chief justice by the judge acting as the chief justice or the government. He [the judge acting as the CJ] will only discharge daily work as per the routine. It has always been like this."

"If any interference is made in the chief justice's administration, it can be easily assumed that the government is interfering in the higher court and this will lead to further deterioration of relationship between the judiciary and the government. It would not bring any good to the state."

The BNP and the Supreme Court Bar Association, which is dominated by pro-BNP lawyers, have been alleging that the government forced Justice SK Sinha to go on leave, but the law minister and the attorney general dismissed it.

On October 14, a day after Sinha left for Australia, the SC said Sinha is facing 11 charges, including money laundering and corruption.

The same day, the attorney general said Sinha's rejoining the office of the CJ after his return from abroad is "a far cry."

Talking to The Daily yesterday, he said the government will now look into the 11 allegations.

Justice Sinha, appointed 21st chief justice of the country in January 2015, came under fire ever since the SC on August 1 this year released the full text of the verdict, scrapping the 16th amendment to the constitution.

The amendment had empowered parliament to remove judges from misconduct or incapacity.

Following the verdict, the prime minister and senior ministers came down heavily on the CJ, with many of them calling for his resignation.

Some pro-AL organisations, including Bangabandhu Awami Ainjibi Parishad, held protest programmes against him. Parishad leaders threatened to launch a tougher agitation if he didn't step down.

On September 13, the Jatiya Sangsad passed a resolution calling for legal steps to nullify the SC verdict. The law minister on several occasions said the government would seek review of the judgment.

In its full verdict, the SC made some observations, which were critical of the country's present political culture.

Talking to the media on August 13, the law minister was particularly critical of the CJ's observation that "no nation, no country is made of or by one person".

This was irrelevant in the case at hand and also contrary to history, he said. "There is no doubt that history has been distorted here."

The minister also said neither the country's independence nor its declaration happened overnight. Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared it after earning the people's mandate through a political movement.

"It will be a crime if I distort it."

While presiding over the Appellate Division bench, Justice Sinha had expressed annoyance and dissatisfaction several times at the government's failure to issue a gazette notification on the rules determining the discipline of lower court judges.

On April 4 this year, he said they (judges) were hurt when the government referred to the president, who is respected and acceptable, regarding the issuance of the gazette notification.

On March 28, he expressed discontent with the government for seeking more time for issuing the gazette notification.

On December 12 last year, Sinha said the president was misinformed about the issuance of the gazette.

He came up with the observation a day after the law ministry had issued a notification saying that the president decided not to issue a separate gazette notification on the conduct rules.

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period. Hence, the burden would be on the government of Bangladesh, CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun said while presenting a paper on the implications of the Rohingya crisis for Bangladesh.

"Given the present budgetary framework for fiscal 2017-18, there is not much room for additional public spending," she said.

Fahmida presented the paper at a dialogue titled "Addressing Rohingya Crisis: Options for Bangladesh" at Khatuna Gardenia Banquet Hall in the capital yesterday. The programme was chaired by CPD Chairman Prof Rehman Sobhan and attended by diplomats, former ambassadors, international relations analysts and officials from UN agencies and other international organisations.

The CPD termed the Rohingya crisis a multi-dimensional problem for Bangladesh and suggested that the government continue "energetic diplomacy" particularly with the regional partners to solve it.

Discussants at the dialogue recommended taking both soft and hard approaches bilaterally and multilaterally so that the Myanmar authorities take back its nationals soon.

Some of them said the issue is likely to linger and affect Bangladesh in various ways.

They also warned about the risk of security, terrorism, spread of diseases, trafficking of women and children as well as illegal drug trade in the south-eastern region if the Rohingyas stayed there for a long period.

Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque said the government wants to see a peaceful solution to the crisis.

He said Myanmar is a close neighbour and Bangladesh has to have good relations with it. The government is currently focusing on signing a bilateral arrangement with the country for the return of the Rohingyas, he added.

Haque said the government was not seeking humanitarian support from the international communities. "Rather, the government asks for political support to solve the Rohingya issue."

"This is a conflict between Myanmar and its own nationals. Bangladesh in no way created this environment. Bangladesh tries to become a responsible

and responsive state. A state which responds to humanitarian crisis," he said.

Fleeing persecution in Myanmar, over 613,000 Rohingyas have entered Bangladesh since August 25.

The CPD said over a million Rohingyas now are staying in the south-eastern region of the country, creating economic, social and environmental challenges for Bangladesh.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow at the think tank, said the total number of refugees across the world is 6.5 crore and Bangladesh would be the fourth largest host country for refugees.

"We have shown generosity and it does not depend on resources, it depends on the heart," he said.

William Moeller, political officer at the US Embassy in Dhaka, said solution lies with Myanmar and Bangladesh is just an innocent bystander to this crisis.

Ragnar Gudmundsson, country representative at International Monetary Fund, said a contingency plan would be very important for Bangladesh.

Anup Kumar Chakma, former Bangladesh ambassador to Myanmar, said Myanmar's relation with countries like China and the US has an impact on the Rohingya issue. He said China, US, India, and Thailand have interests and investments in Myanmar.

Imtiaz Ahmed, professor of international relations at University of Dhaka, recommended "becoming proactive" and sending high-level delegation to countries, particularly to China and India.

Referring to the ongoing atrocities against Rohingyas, Border Guard Bangladesh Director General Maj Gen Abul Hossain said the matter should be taken to the International Court of Justice.

Former ambassador Farooq Sobhan claimed that there was an attempt within Myanmar to permanently solve the Rohingya issue. He said One Belt One Road initiative of China would be seriously jeopardised if the issue was not resolved.

"There is also a potential threat of terrorism due to the crisis," he said.

Prof Sukamol Barua from Buddhist Federation said the Rohingya crisis is not a religious issue. He said local Buddhists were very cautious over the matter.