

Congress criticises army chief

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

India's main opposition party the Congress yesterday joined the growing chorus of criticism of army chief General Bipin Rawat for his comment on Assam-based political organisation All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) and said the armed forces should maintain its non-political character.

Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Ghulam Nabi Azad, said India takes pride in the fact that its army is non-political. Since India's independence, the army has been non-political. It should remain like that.

At a press conference in New Delhi, the senior Congress leader, who had declined to comment on the issue just a few days ago, said, "We have great regard for the army -- our protector. But it should not be concerned with which political party has grown or where it has got support from."

Rawat on February 21 said Badruddin Ajmal-led AIUDF grew "faster" than the BJP in Assam in 1980s.

Speaking at a seminar in New Delhi, Rawat had also said that a "planned" influx of people from Bangladesh into India's Northeast is taking place as part of proxy warfare by Pakistan, with support from

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Nobel laureates Tawakkol Karman, right, and Mairiad Maguire, on Karman's right, at Maguchhara Rohingya refugee camp in Ukhiya of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

College girl's body found at airport station

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police recovered the body of an 18-year-old college girl near Airport Railway Station in Dhaka around 7:30am.

The body was stuffed inside a travel bag, Officer-in-Charge Yasin Faruk of Kamalapur Government Railway Police (GRP) told The Daily Star.

Deceased Akhi was a student of Pallabi Mohila Degree College, her uncle Nurul Islam told The Daily Star.

Akhi's parents have been living in Mauritius for the last four years. She used to live with her uncle in

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Ancient

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Egypt's relics are a draw for foreign visitors and authorities hope new finds can help attract more as a way to help revive tourism hit by the unrest that followed the overthrow of former President Hosni Mubarak in 2011.

The number of tourists visiting the country rose 54 percent to 8.3 million last year, still below the 14.7 million who came in 2010.

Mostafa Waziri, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, said the scarab charm with the new year greeting had been unearthed last New Year's Eve in a "wonderful coincidence".

Students stage demo for reform

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"It's a conspiracy. It's the Jamaat-Shibir activists who have been staging demonstration demanding reformation of the quota system under the banner of general students," said Mehedi Hasan, president of the association.

The anti-quota protesters held the existing system responsible for many meritorious candidates' failure to get the jobs they deserve. Currently, only 44 percent job seekers are recruited on the basis of merit. The remaining 56 percent candidates are recruited on the basis of the privileges under various quotas.

Of the 56 percent, 30 percent are kept for freedom fighters' children and grandchildren, 10 percent for women, 10 percent for people from districts lagging behind, 5 percent for people of indigenous communities, and people with disabilities have the remaining one percent.

The aspirants claimed that the existing quota system is hugely disproportionate and it has been there for ages. They said it has left the nation with two grave consequences - competent candidates being driven to other jobs and bureaucracy being devoid of merit in the long run.

There had been protests against the quota system earlier in Dhaka and other places. On February 17, jobseekers held a demonstration at the base of Raju Vashkarjo (Raju Memorial Sculpture) on the Dhaka University campus.

Yesterday around 11:00am, the protesters, holding placards with the demands written on them, tried to form a human chain at the Shahbagh intersection.

But police barred the protest in order to avoid "public sufferings", said Abul Hasan, officer-in-charge of Shahbagh Police Station.

Being obstructed, more than 1,000 students and jobseekers from different universities and colleges of the capital -- mostly from Dhaka University -- started their sit-in around 11:30am.

They demonstrated for over an hour there and later sent a four-member delegation to the Prime Minister's Office to submit a memorandum, having the five-point demands.

The delegation -- comprising three DU students and one from Dhaka College -- submitted the memorandum.

"We, the general students, are facing huge discrimination," said Masud Ahmed, a DU graduate.

Another job aspirant, Mohammad Russell, said, "There should be a certain quota for our freedom fighters for their contributions in the war, but not such a large chunk like 30 percent. The government must reduce the percentage gradually and keep it to 10 percent."

He said if anyone from a family enjoys the benefit of quota, its other members should not get it.

Al Mamun, a student of Dhaka College, said a large number of posts in civil service exams remain vacant as jobseekers applying under the quotas were not found suitable against the available posts.

But, thousands of qualified candidates are not getting jobs despite appearing in the recruitment tests repeatedly, he added.

He also demanded that the government recruit job seekers based on merit if the posts under quota remain unfilled.

In the last few civil service recruitment examinations, a total of 3,500 posts remained vacant as eligible aspirants were not found under the quota. A total of 813 posts remained vacant in the 28th BCS, 792 in the 29th BCS, 784 in the 30th, 773 in the 31st and 338 in the 35th.

The protesters also announced to hold a protest programme wearing black badges at different colleges and universities across the country on March 4.

More than a thousand students of different departments of Rajshahi University (RU) joined the demonstration on the campus yesterday, voicing similar demands.

The students formed an hour-long human chain in Paris Road area of the university at 11:00am and brought out a silent procession that paraded different roads on the campus.

Salahuddin Sayem, son of a freedom fighter, said, "Being a child of a freedom fighter, I do not want cancellation of this quota. But as its proportion is too high, it is taking away opportunities from thousands of

meritorious students. That's why I want this system to reform."

Sayem, a student of history department, said, "My father fought in the Liberation War for the welfare of this country, not for creating any discrimination among its people."

Another demonstrator, Mominur Rashid, a student of philosophy department, said, "We do not want the cancellation of the quota system, we want its reform."

At Jahangirnagar University, more than 600 students yesterday demonstrated on the campus by forming a human chain in front of the university central Shaheed Minar.

The students started the programme at 11:00am to press home their five-point demand.

A masters student of public administration department, Saleq Muhid, also a son of a freedom fighter, said, "It's not ethical that we are getting advantages as sons of freedom fighters. Those who gave away their lives in 1971 did not make the sacrifice only for them and their children. Their dream was to make a society equal for all."

In Chittagong University, over 300 students of different departments formed a human chain at Central Shaheed Minar premises around 11:00am to press home their demand.

Coordinator of the protest programme, Mizanur Rahman, a fourth year student of political science department, said that they are being deprived of government jobs because of the quota system.

"We are not against the quota. But the government should emphasise merit and give priorities to 90% general students. We want an immediate review of quota system," he said, seeking prime minister's intervention in removing the "discrimination" in government jobs.

A similar demonstration was held in Mawlana Bhashani Science and Technology University in Tangail.

Students of all the departments joined the one-hour human chain in front of the administrative building with a slogan -- "Bangabandhu Banglai, Boishommer thai nai" (There is no room for discrimination in Bangabandhu's Bangla).

Khaleda kept in wait

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the verdict to file the appeal.

Her lawyers, who were expecting the HC to grant her bail, expressed disappointment at the HC's decision to wait for the case documents.

Terming the HC decision "unusual", Moudud Ahmed said he has never been in such a situation in his 50-year career in legal profession.

"The bail process has been delayed. We will wait... We hope Khaleda Zia will get bail in the case," Moudud, also former law minister, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Mahbub Uddin Khokon, another counsel for Khaleda, said, "We are very upset."

"Usually, the High Court grants a convict bail after accepting his or her appeal against the trial court verdict. But it did not grant Khaleda Zia bail."

Khokon, also BNP joint secretary general, pointed out that the HC had earlier granted bail to Awami League lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi in a corruption case in which he was convicted and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

In that case, the HC didn't ask for case records from the trial court for deciding on Bodi's bail prayer. The HC granted him bail and accepted his appeal against the trial court verdict the same day he moved the pleas before it, said the lawyer.

It is unprecedented that the HC has given the trial court 15 days for providing it with the records in Khaleda's case, he mentioned.

Khokon, however, said they will wait for the case records to reach the HC.

The BNP chief will not move any petition before the Supreme Court against the HC decision to wait for the case records, he told this newspaper after holding a meeting with several BNP leaders and pro-BNP lawyers at the conference room of the Supreme Court Bar Association.

YESTERDAY'S HEARING

In a packed courtroom, the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Shahidul Karim heard arguments in favour of and against Khaleda's bail prayer.

During the hearing, Khaleda's lawyer AJ Mohammad Ali prayed to the HC for granting her bail in the graft case, saying the HC may grant her bail as she was given "a short sentence" of five years' imprisonment and has been in jail since February 8.

Ali, also former attorney general, mentioned that the courts have a long tradition of granting bail to a convict or an accused if the person is a woman.

He argued that the BNP chief is now 73, and she has been suffering from various chronic degenerative medical conditions.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam and Anti-Corruption Commission's lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan vehemently opposed the bail prayer on different grounds.

Mahbubey said the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case is the first case in Bangladesh, which was filed on the charges of misappropriating orphans' money.

As the then chief executive of the country, Khaleda cannot avoid the responsibility for the embezzlement of the orphans' money, he said.

The attorney general further said former president HM Ershad had been granted bail after he spent three and a half years in jail in the Janata Tower corruption case. He had been convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment in that case.

Why should Khaleda be granted bail in less than a month after she was convicted and sentenced to five years' imprisonment, he questioned.

The attorney general also said that if

HC may consider the convict's bail prayer.

He argued that Khaleda has not submitted any attested documents to the HC in support of the grounds mentioned in her bail petition.

During yesterday's proceedings, the two judges left the courtroom at 2:10pm after a pandemonium broke out with several lawyers shouting over sitting arrangement.

Before leaving, the judges asked the lawyers to calm down for the proceedings to continue.

They returned to the courtroom after around 10 minutes as the situation became normal following departure of some junior lawyers.

ZIA CHARITABLE TRUST CASE

The Special Judge's Court-5, which convicted Khaleda in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case, extended Khaleda's bail until today in another corruption case.

Judge MD Akhteruzzaman of the special court passed the order yesterday after Khaleda's lawyer Moudud Ahmed submitted a petition seeking extension of her bail in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case.

The court on February 1 gave Khaleda ad-interim bail till yesterday and asked her to appear before it. But she could not appear before it yesterday as she is now in jail.

Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol moved a petition before the court for issuing a production warrant against Khaleda.

The court will give an order on Kajol's plea today.

On February 8, the special court awarded Khaleda five years' rigorous imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case. It also sentenced her elder son Tarique Rahman, now acting BNP chairman, and four others to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment each.

The court also fined them a total of Tk 2.10 crore, saying all the six convicts have to pay the fine in equal amounts.

The ACC filed the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case with Ramna Police Station in July 2008, accusing the six of misappropriating over Tk 2.1 crore that came from a foreign bank as grants for orphans.

The anti-graft body filed the Zia Charitable corruption case with Tejgaon Police Station in August 2011, accusing Khaleda and three others of abusing power to raise funds for the trust from unknown sources.

The three other accused are: Harris Chowdhury, political secretary of the then PM Khaleda between 2001 and 2006; Ziaul Islam Munna, assistant private secretary (APS) to Harris; and Monirul Islam Khan, APS of former Dhaka city mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka.



An excavator burns near a bridge over the Pungli river on the Dhaka-Tangail highway yesterday. During a drive against sand lifters, a mobile court torched the earth-moving equipment instead of seizing it. The sand lifters had abandoned the excavator while fleeing the scene. Three nearby bridges, including a rail bridge, were being threatened by the sand lifting.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Wounds yet to heal

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later renamed Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

Tasim, now an HSC student at a cadet college, remembered that it was a typical morning.

"We heard the first gunshots at the assembly hall, which was not far, two hours after my father left home. I was home with my three-year-old brother and my grand-mother. I called him, but the phone was switched off," he told this correspondent at Banani graveyard.

Grieving families offered their prayers and laid flowers on the graves of their loved ones yesterday. Some demanded February 25 be declared martyred soldier

day.

Many of them said they were waiting for the execution of the verdict in a case filed over the killings of their near and dear ones.

"Fifty seven army officers were martyred. I hope the day is valued with due respect," Lucky Sarwar, sister of slain Maj Kazi Mosaddek Hossain, said. Lucky went to the graveyard with Mosaddek's daughter Laika to pay their homage.

The chiefs of three defence forces and the chief of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) first laid flowers on the graves.

The High Court announced the verdict in the case in November last year, but it is yet to release the full judgment.

Deputy Attorney General KM Zahid

Sarwar Kazal on Saturday said as the HC did not release the full verdict, neither the government nor the accused could file appeals with the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court.

On November 27 last year, the HC confirmed death penalty for 139 out of the 152 accused who were handed capital punishment by a lower court for their involvement in the killings during the mutiny.

Terming the offenders "most brutal" and "cold-blooded" murderers, a three-member special bench of the HC pronounced the verdict in the biggest-ever criminal case in the country's history in terms of numbers of accused and convicts.