

JS body given one month for digital security bill scrutiny

Parliament yesterday gave the committee concerned another month for further scrutiny of the Digital Security Bill-2018.

Imran Ahmed, Awami League lawmaker from Sylhet-4 and also the chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Post, Telecom and ICT, submitted the request, which was passed by a voice vote in the Jatiya Sangsad.

Earlier on June 6, the House had given two more months to the parliamentary committee for scrutiny of the bill.

While placing his proposal, Imran told the parliament that the committee needed more time for further scrutiny as the bill was very important.

The much-debated Digital Security Bill was placed in parliament on April 9 amid growing concerns from journalists and rights activists that freedom of the press and expression would be jeopardised if the bill was passed. The parliamentary watchdog had then been given an additional four weeks to submit its report before the House.

In the face of growing demand, the parliamentary standing committee invited the Editors' Council,

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BNP leaders and activists gather in front of the Jatiya Press Club yesterday to form a human chain to press home their demand for Khaleda Zia's release and a nonpartisan government during national polls. Inset, a number of BNP activists leaving the venue are detained and taken away in a police vehicle on Topkhana Road.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

BNP demands Khaleda's release

Dozens arrested during party's human chain

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government must release BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia from jail to show its intent on holding a fair and acceptable national election, the BNP said yesterday.

"We clearly say that the election will never be acceptable to people if Khaleda Zia is in jail," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir.

Addressing a human chain programme in front of the Jatiya Press Club, Fakhru said, "The government must release our leader [Khaleda] from jail. If they do so, we will understand they want an acceptable election."

The party formed the human chain as a part of its two-day countrywide programme demanding release of Khaleda, who has been in prison since February 8 after a special court sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

The BNP got permission verbally from the Dhaka Metropolitan Police to form the human chain from 11:00am to 12:00 noon. Party leaders and activists started thronging the spot since 10:00am and at one stage, vehicular movement halted there.

A large number of law enforcers with an armoured personnel carrier and water-cannon equipped riot vehicle were seen in and around the venue.

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Holy Ashura on Sept 21

BSS, Dhaka

The holy Ashura, commemorating the martyrdom of Hazrat Imam Hossain (RA), grandson of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH), will be observed in the country on September 21.

The National Moon Sighting Committee took the decision at a meeting last evening as the new moon of Muharram, the first month of Hijri 1440, was not sighted in the country yesterday, an official release said.

The meeting was held at the Islamic Foundation at Baitul Mukarram national mosque, with Religious Affairs Secretary Md Anisur Rahman in the chair.

BNP to pledge reforms, checks and balances

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the executive branch gradually becoming all too powerful, it said.

Checks and balances is a principle of government under which separate branches are empowered to prevent actions by other branches and are induced to share power. They are of fundamental importance in tripartite governments, such as that of the United States, which separate powers among legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

Party leaders think proper checks and balances is a must to stop the "unbridled power of the government".

They drafted a 15-point proposal to be sent to other political parties for consideration, said BNP insiders.

With these, the BNP would start talks with potential partners like Gono Forum, Bikalpadhara Bangladesh,

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-JSD and Nagorik Oikya.

In the draft proposal, the party promises to free the administration from politicisation and ensure independence and power of the judiciary through transparent appointment process. The draft promises reforms in institutions for preventing corruption and ensuring good governance.

Some of the proposals are related to pre-election demands. Releasing jailed Khaleda Zia, dissolving the parliament before the election schedule is announced, forming election-time neutral government in consultation with all political parties, reforming the Election Commission based on consensus, deploying the army during the polls with magistracy power, and deploying local and international observers to

ensure transparency in the elections are among the proposals, BNP insiders said.

The BNP standing committee members finalised the draft after holding a series of meetings and in consultation with party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman.

Leaders of the BNP and other political parties said the like-minded parties had agreed on some of the basic issues. The election should be held under a non-partisan interim administration is one of them.

Sources said the BNP is preparing to run in the polls to be held in December and forging a greater unity was part of the groundwork even though it has not publicly cleared its stance on contesting the elections.

It wants to unite other parties, excluding ruling Awami League, that would raise

their voices on common issues.

"The process has just started and it is still in the initial stage. We have said that to forge a national unity, small interests should be sacrificed for greater interests of the country and we are ready to do that," Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir, secretary general of the BNP, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Fakhru refused to comment further.

The Jukto Front alliance, led by Bikalpadhara Bangladesh and comprised of ASM Abdur Rob's Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal-JSD and Mahmudur Rahman Manna's Nagorik Oikya, and Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain has said they would work together for greater unity.

"We have placed seven proposals to the BNP and the party agreed on five

points but is yet to make clear its position on two points - checks and balances and ties with anti-liberation forces," Mahi B Chowdhury, a leader of the Jukto Front, told The Daily Star.

Mahi said the BNP had indicated that it was ready to share 100 seats with them but the BNP was yet to decide on its position on Jamaat.

Dr Kamal, who had left the Awami League in the 80s, said his only point is that the country is run in the light of the constitution and all have to come forward with an open mind.

"We do not want to make the process complicated. We are holding meetings regularly. We are not discussing about seat sharing as it is not our agenda. We hope that the greater unity will be formed soon," he said.

Shahidul's bail plea

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Shahidul, 63, is now in Dhaka Central Jail in a case lodged under the controversial section 57 of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act.

Police charged him with "spreading propaganda and false information against the government".

The renowned photographer was picked up by plainclothes men from his home in the capital's Dhanmondi on August 5.

Police filed the case against him and produced him before a Dhaka court the following day. He was then placed on a seven-day remand.

In court, Shahidul said he was tortured in custody. Police denied the allegation.

On completion of his seven-day remand, Shahidul was denied bail and

sent to jail by a Dhaka court on August 13.

On September 4, a judge of another HC bench felt "embarrassed" to hear Shahidul's bail petition in the case. The same day, the bench forwarded the petition to the chief justice for a decision, saying one of the bench members felt "embarrassed" to hear the matter.

The bench, however, did not disclose any reason for it.

Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain yesterday assigned the HC bench led by Justice Md Rezaul Haque to hear and dispose of the bail petition of Shahidul, Jyotirmoy added.

Many notable personalities, including Nobel laureate Amartya Sen along with 11 other Nobel prize winners, have called for immediate release of Shahidul.

12 students produced in court, finally

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Each of the 12 students were placed on a two-day remand in the police assault case while Tarek Aziz was placed on a further two-day remand in the ICT case.

The development came a day after family members of the 12 alleged that the students had been taken into DB custody on September 5. Police yesterday, however, said they were from picked up from Tejkunipara area on September 9.

The families on Sunday had asked the authorities to either release their children or produce them before a court if they had committed any crimes.

Masudur Rahman, deputy commissioner (Media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, yesterday told The Daily Star that the arrestees were leaders and activists of Islami Chhatra Shibir and they had tried to divert the student movement and deteriorate the law and order situation by spreading rumours.

The 12 students are-- Saifullah bin Mansur, Al Amin, Jahirul Islam Hasib, Mujahidul Islam, Jahangir Alam, Gazi M Borhan Uddin, Tarek Aziz, Mahfuz, Raihanul Abedin, Iftekhar Alam, Tarek Aziz and Mehedi Hasan Rajib.

Police claimed they recovered 12 sets of uniforms and 13 fake ID cards of different educational institutions, three laptops and some publications of Islami Chhatra Shibir from the detainees, all of which were collected in a bid to create anarchy during the movement.

Besides, two of the 12 were among the 400 to 500 students from different colleges and universities, who took to the street in front of Ahsanullah University in Tejgaon Industrial area and threw bricks at police, leaving at least four policemen injured, police



Some of the 12 students, picked up by detectives allegedly six days ago, are handcuffed while being taken to court yesterday. Police accused them of attacking law enforcers and spreading rumours during last month's student movement for road safety.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

said. About the families' allegation of their children's confinement, Mashirul Rahman, deputy commissioner of Detective Branch (north) of the DMP, told The Daily Star that the statement of the parents were "not acceptable".

"Conscious parents never support such acts from their children... The parents do not know what their sons are doing. So their statements are not acceptable," he said.

Police said the youths were leaders

and activist of Shibir and they were involved in spreading rumours, attacking police and writing abusive words on some of the vehicles carrying important persons, including a judge, during the movement.

During a press briefing on Sunday at the Crime Reporters' Association, the family members alleged that many students were picked up from different messes in Tejgaon and Mohakhali on September 5.

All, except the 12, were released.

The family members also alleged that the detainees were tortured in DB custody, an allegation denied by police.

Mansur Rahman said his two sons-- Saifullah and Sifat--were picked up from a student mess on that day. Sifat was released a day later while Saifullah was in DB custody, he alleged.

Meanwhile, rights body Ain o Salish Kendra condemned the alleged confinement of the students in DB custody.

Opposition blocks roads

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Protesters burnt tyres and blocked traffic in the north eastern state of Assam. Several people were arrested in Assam and West Bengal, officials said.

Television footage showed protesters breaking car and bus windows in Patna, the capital of the northern state of Bihar.

Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) accused its opponents of "unnecessarily politicising" high fuel prices and the weakening currency, which it blamed on external factors such as Turkey's economic crisis which affected emerging markets.

Ravi Shankar Prasad, the country's law minister, condemned the incidents of violence.

"The BJP strongly believes that

despite some momentary difficulties, the people of India do not support this protest," he said in a televised address.

Taxes on petrol and diesel, which account for more than a third of retail fuel prices, are one of the biggest sources of income for the government, and an emotive issue for voters.

Past governments have usually lowered taxes when international oil prices shot up, but Modi's administration has made little concession so far.

Modi's popularity has come down in the past few months and his party is likely to face a tough challenge in three BJP-ruled states - Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh - in general to vote this year, and at the general election expected early next year.

capacity, the premier said the capacity has grown to 20,000 MW from 3,200 MW over the past nine and a half years.

About the cooperation in the railway sector, she said Bangladesh and India were working to reopen the pre-1965 rail links for cargo transport between the two countries.

She hoped the two countries would soon jointly inaugurate the groundbreaking for the construction of the 3rd and 4th dual gauge rail tracks between Dhaka and Tongi, and doubling the

dual gauge tracks between Tongi and Joydevpur funded by India under its Line of Credit.

Speaking at the programme, Modi said India was proud to help Hasina realise the high goals, set by her, of transforming Bangladesh into a middle income nation by 2021 and a developed one by 2041, reports our New Delhi correspondent.

He expressed confidence that the India-Bangladesh development partnership would touch new heights in future.

He said he met Hasina several times recently, including at the Bimstec meeting in Kathmandu, in Shantiniketan, and during the Commonwealth Summit in London.

Modi said relations between leaders of neighbouring countries should be like those among the neighbours. "Talking to each other whenever we feel like and visiting each other whenever we want. Protocol should not come in the way of such interactions."

He said India and Bangladesh has taken a series of steps to forge greater rail and power connectivity between

them.

The Indian premier said during his visit to Dhaka in June 2015, he had promised to supply 500MW to Bangladesh and today 1.15 gigawatts of power was being transmitted using the grids in West Bengal. He thanked West Bengal CM Mamata for this cooperation.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, his Indian counterpart Sushma Swaraj and the chief ministers of West Bengal and Tripura also spoke on the occasion.

9,000MW power to be imported by 2041

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Bangladesh needed more energy to continue its high economic growth and the government was planning to import electricity from neighbours under the regional cooperation framework.

Hoping that India would remain beside Bangladesh in its endeavour, she said Modi would take necessary steps regarding Mamata's offer to supply additional 1,000 MW power to Bangladesh.

The PM said Bangladesh-India relations have now become a role model for

the rest of the world. In recent years, the two nations witnessed a remarkable progress on cooperation in a host of areas, including trade and commerce, power and energy, connectivity and infrastructure development, she added.

Referring to her government's success in increasing the power generation