

Join forces with the AL to forge national unity

Obaidul Quader calls on pro-liberation parties

BSS, Dhaka

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday called upon the pro-liberation political parties to forge unity against the communal forces.

"We want to forge national unity among the pro-liberation political parties against the communal and anti-liberation forces and corruption, terrorism and unhealthy politics," he told a rally at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh, in the capital.

Samyabadi Dal organised the rally marking its 71st founding anniversary with the party's General Secretary Dilip Barua in the chair.

Politburo members of Samyabadi Dal Lutfar Rahman and Biren Sarker and leaders of the 14-party alliance

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AL leader files GD against SK Sinha

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

An Awami League leader yesterday filed a general diary against former chief justice SK Sinha with Pabna Sadar Police Station accusing him of delivering "objectionable, false and fabricated" speech against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

In the GD, AL central sub-committee's Assistant Secretary KM Hasan Kabir Arif alleged that Sinha came up with the speech at a conference in the United Kingdom.

However, he did not mention exactly what Sinha had said or when the conference was held.

His speech has tarnished the image of the government and diminished the prestige of Sheikh Hasina, alleged Kabir in the GD.

Talking to The Daily Star, the AL leader claimed the government had a copy of the speech and details about the conference. If the matter could be investigated, everything would be revealed, he added.

"As a conscious citizen of Bangladesh, my prestige has also diminished. Legal action should be taken after investigating the matter," he said in the GD.

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Suu Kyi

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UN investigators issued a report in August accusing Myanmar's military of carrying out mass killings of Muslim Rohingyas with "genocidal intent" in an operation that drove more than 700,000 refugees across the border to Bangladesh.

Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for campaigning for democracy and now leads the Myanmar government, was accused in the same report of failing to use her "moral authority" to protect civilians.

"We see what she's been doing in Myanmar has been questioned a lot and we stand for human rights, that's one of our core values," Lars Heikensten, the head of the Nobel Foundation, said.

"So of course to the extent that she's responsible for that, that is very regrettable," he added.

Government spokesman Zaw Htay did not answer phone calls seeking comment on Monday. He said last month he would no longer speak to the media over the phone, only at a biweekly conference.

Myanmar has rejected the UN findings as "one-sided". It says the military action, which followed militant attacks on security forces in August last year, was a legitimate counterinsurgency operation.

Suu Kyi said last month that in hindsight her government could have handled the situation in Rakhine state better, but did not acknowledge any major crimes.

"We don't believe it would make sense to try to withdraw prizes ... it would involve us in constant discussions about the merits about what people are doing afterwards, after they have received the prize," Heikensten said.

"There has always been and there always will be Nobel laureates that are doing things that they've been awarded the prize which we do not approve of or which we don't think are the right things. That we cannot avoid I think," he added.

The Stockholm-based Nobel Foundation oversees the administration of all the Nobel Prizes, which are awarded by different organisations in Sweden and Norway.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee, which awards the Peace Prize, said in August that its rules did not allow awards to be withdrawn.

The laureate of this year's Nobel Peace Prize will be announced on Friday in Oslo.



A damaged room on the second floor of National Fan Factory building in Tongi's BSCIC Industrial Area after a blast occurred there yesterday. Two factory workers were killed and 20 others injured in the explosion.

PHOTO: STAR

Agents rake in millions

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across the country.

This is where manipulation, bribery and even cheating took place on a massive scale.

The official fee the three companies were supposed to charge for the regularisation of the workers was 1,150 Malaysian Ringgit (1RM: 20.36 TK). Including insurance and medical test fees totalling RM 350 and an annual levy of RM 2,400, which the employer is legally obligated to pay, the highest amount an irregular migrant was supposed to pay was RM 3,900, said a Bangladeshi broker in Kuala Lumpur on condition of anonymity.

However, according to migrants interviewed, the agents collected double or even triple the amount in different phases of registration -- collecting fingerprint, medical test report and final submission of the application to the immigration department. The agents charged fees ranging from RM 6,000 to 10,000 for each.

In many cases the migrants even had to bribe the employers for acquiring papers that showed they were hiring the foreign workers.

"LIVING IN A LIMBO" Some eight lakh foreign workers applied to the immigration department for work permits under the rehiring programme, the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF) Executive Director Shamsuddin Bardan said.

Considering that this figure may not show the true picture, as many agents had tricked migrants by taking money from them for the permits without filing any documents, the amount of money the agents received is "astronomical".

Of some 10 lakh Bangladeshis working in Malaysia, half were undocumented, said an official at the Bangladesh High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, adding that almost all

of the five lakh undocumented ones had applied for regularisation but did not get it.

"Even if the minimum amount of 6,000 Ringgit is considered, the five lakh Bangladeshis have paid 300 crore Ringgit, which is more than Tk 6,077 crore," said Mohammad Harun Al Rashid, a Bangladeshi migrant rights activist in Kuala Lumpur.

Another problem was that the Bangladesh High Commission official did not know of the number of Bangladeshis who were issued work permits under the rehiring programme.

Bangladeshi migrants in Selangor, Kuala Lumpur and Melaka told this correspondent that not more than 20 percent of the applicants for regularisation got the work permits.

"This is a precarious situation. They paid so much of their hard-earned money but are still living in a limbo. Thousands of migrants are facing detention and risks of deportation," Harun said.

Between July 1 and last week, 10,495 workers from Bangladesh, Nepal, Indonesia, the Philippines, India and Pakistan have been held, Immigration Department Director-General Mustafar Ali said.

The exact number of the detained Bangladeshis could not be confirmed. However, Mustafar on September 4, said over 30,000 foreign workers had been detained since January and around 6,000 of them were Bangladeshis.

A Bangladeshi migrant, Saiful Islam, while describing his sufferings, said he paid 5,000 Ringgit to a Bangladeshi agent towards the end of November in 2016, but the agent disappeared before the final submission of his application to the immigration department. After failing to trace the agent, Saiful applied for a work

permit through an agent of MyEG again in the middle of 2017.

"But I'm yet to receive the work permit," he told this correspondent at a restaurant in Cyberjaya on September 12.

"I don't know why the immigration department has not issued my work permit. I am living in fear of arrest," added Saiful.

NO REDRESS YET

Bardan, the MEF executive director, gave a brief picture of the applicants' status. He said of the eight lakh applicants some 3.5 lakh had been approved so far, while around some one lakh applications were rejected. The rest could be waiting for approval from the Malaysian home ministry.

He, however, expressed surprise at how only 800,000 undocumented foreign workers had applied when there was an estimated 30 lakh such workers in Malaysia.

Tian Chua, vice president of People's Justice Party, a component of the now ruling Pakatan Harapan (PH) coalition in Malaysia, said many of the agencies under the rehiring programme did not submit applications to the immigration department during the transition of the government. The PH coalition came to power, defeating Barisan Nasional, in the general polls in May this year.

"When the police pick them [migrants] up, they say they submitted applications to the agents. But many of them [agents] are corrupt. When they [police] check in the system...if the passports [included with the applications] are not found, you are stuck," Chua, also an expert on labour issues, told this correspondent at a hotel in Kuala Lumpur on September 18.

Further complicating matters was the presence of fake agents involved in the rehiring programme. One such syndicate was busted by immigration

police in Kajang and Nilai areas on August 15.

The syndicate, led by a 35-year-old Malaysian known as "Abang Is", was found to have cheated over 270 foreign workers from India, Indonesia, Bangladesh and Myanmar, and earned RM 22 lakh, reported The Star, a Malaysian newspaper.

The migrants said fraudulent practices by the labour agents have been a massive problem in Malaysia.

"The agents have made our lives hell. They are sucking our blood," said Sarwar Hossain, a Bangladeshi migrant working at a construction firm in Cyberjaya.

Glorene Dass, executive director of Tenaganita, a rights body in Kuala Lumpur, said the agents defrauded and deceived people, but faced little action.

"For example, workers are not given receipts of rehiring payments and many agents cheat workers...there is no adequate redress mechanism that can investigate and track these agents," she said.

Tian Chua admitted that many of the migrants were victims of corruption by the private companies and their agents who had connections with the previous government. The present government is trying to correct it, he said.

"We need to have a bilateral discussion with Bangladesh and see how we can find a solution," said Tian Chua, also a former MP.

Harun, the Bangladeshi right activist, said Bangladesh High Commission should have created massive awareness among the migrants on how not to fall prey to the fraudulent agents, but it has done little in this regard.

This correspondent called High Commissioner Shahidul Islam and Labour Councillor Sayedul Islam several times on their phones, but they did not answer.

Two killed

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Rahim, an employee of the factory, said two bodies have so far been recovered from the rubble.

Twenty injured workers were rushed to Tongi Shaheed Ahsan Ullah Master Hospital, a resident doctor confirmed.

Station Officer Ashiqur Rahman of Tongi Fire Station said the blast occurred inside the "heat chamber" on the second floor of the three-storey factory. Two units of firefighters brought the fire under control after an hour efforts.

A five-member probe committee headed by Additional District Magistrate Moshir Rahman has been formed to investigate the matter.

Case-spree

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While BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is in jail on graft charges, other top leaders including standing committee members, joint and organising secretaries now remain burdened with cases.

Mirza Fakhrul said the government filed as many as 4,098 cases against nearly 300,000 BNP men and arrested at least 4,300 activists in September alone.

"These are nothing but baseless and ghostly cases filed with political motives," said Fakhrul, accused in 87 cases.

Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, one of the organising secretaries facing 107 cases now, said the government is filing false cases one after another as it has become desperate towards the end of its tenure.

"We are not worried about new cases. We have only two concerns now - election and movement," he said.

A mid-ranking leader, wishing anonymity, said they will observe the situation till the announcement of election schedule. "We will go for movement only after the announcement of the election schedule."

The filing of fresh cases has prompted the BNP leaders to seek anticipatory bails from the High Court. Moudud Ahmed and Sanaullah Miah yesterday secured that in two separate cases filed on Monday.

Moudud, a standing committee member, is accused in 28 cases, while pro-BNP lawyer Sanaullah faces at least 9 cases.

"The government wants to keep us away from the election and from movement, but we will not budge from our stances," Khandakar Mosharraf Hossain told The Daily Star.

Mosharraf, another standing committee member, is facing 17 cases.

"The government is moving ahead with an outline for a one-sided and silent election without people's participation," BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi said at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

"Filing of the cases against our senior leaders is the first step towards implementing their plan"

He said police are always ready with a format of fictitious charges to arrest BNP leaders and activists, and implicate them in cases. "They used the same format to file cases against our senior leaders in the past."

Deal signed

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"The name 'Sonali Bag' was given by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. The commercial production of jute-made bag will begin within six to nine months," Azam said after signing the MoU, adding that the price of the Sonali Bag would be relatively high in the beginning, but will decrease along with the increase of production.

He hoped that the demand of the bag will be high in the market.

Since 2010, noted scientist and chief scientific officer at BJMC Dr Mubarak Hossain had been trying to invent a biodegradable polymer from jute fibre.

In 2015, he finally found success.

Speaking to The Daily Star earlier, Mubarak said jute polymer had the potential to usher in a new era in the packaging industry, in Bangladesh and across the world, by replacing the conventional petroleum-based polymers such as polythene and polypropylene.

It can also help boost the country's economy, given the rising demand for environment-friendly bags in developed countries, he added.

Mubarak further said although biodegradable, this jute polymer is water and air resistant and is 1.5 times stronger than polythene. It also decomposes in soil within five to six months as opposed to polythene which could take several hundred years.

In May 2017, two years after the ground-breaking invention, the government began a trial production under a project named "Sonali Bag" at the state-run Latif Bawani Jute Mills in Dhaka's Demra.

Textiles and Jute Ministry's Secretary Md Faizur Rahman Chowdhury, BJMC Chairman Md Mahmudul Hassan and Mubarak Hossain, among others, were present at the ceremony.

Asean ministers for prosecuting the culprits

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commission includes two local and two international members from Japan and the Philippines, reports Reuters.

The 10-member Asean, formed more than half a century ago, has historically struggled with challenges facing the region because it works only by consensus and is reluctant to get involved in any matter deemed to be internal to any of its members.

The group's recent statements on Rakhine have focused on the repatriation of displaced persons to Myanmar and reconciliation among communities.

The details of the violence have been stated in the 444-page report released by the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission last month.

The Singapore minister called upon the Myanmar government to implement more of the recommendations of

a UN Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, saying they would address the root causes of the crisis.

Balakrishnan said the next "key milestone" that Asean wanted to see in the crisis was the repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar.

"Specifically what we said last week to Myanmar was that we expect the voluntary repatriation to begin soon and Asean stands ready to help facilitate that in any way possible."

Meanwhile, the Myanmar National Human Rights Commission yesterday urged the governments of Myanmar and Bangladesh to immediately start the repatriation of more than 700,000 Muslims who fled from Rakhine to Bangladesh, the Myanmar Times reported yesterday.

"I urge that the best thing for both sides is to quickly implement the MoU," commission Chair U Win Mra said. "Rather than saying who is not implementing and who is delaying, if

both sides implement the MoU effectively and quickly, initiatives can be started for their return," said U Win Mra, chairman of the commission.

He was a member of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State, led by late UN secretary-general Kofi Annan, which was tasked with finding a sustainable solution to the Rakhine crisis.

About the advisory commission, the Singapore foreign minister said the proposed measures were aimed at reducing poverty among the Rohingyas, improving their basic rights and promoting trust, harmony and reconciliation between the Rohingyas and the broader Myanmar society.

"We need circumstances in which there are opportunities for reconciliation, for assurances of justice and equality and, ultimately, for better prospects for all communities.

"Otherwise this long-term, inter-communal, complex situation will

fester, and if this festers it will create more opportunities for extremism and, ultimately, terrorism, which will not respect boundaries and will represent a clear and present threat throughout South-east Asia and beyond," Balakrishnan said, according to a report of The Straits Times.

The minister said Asean cannot compel Myanmar to take any steps.

"But what we can do is through moral suasion, through persuasion, through transparency and keeping this on the agenda and also telling the Myanmar government that we want and hope for a long-term viable, good outcome and Asean stands ready to help."

The responsibility for resolving the crises must lie with the government of Myanmar, he added.

The members of Asean are Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar and Cambodia.

Winners include first woman in 55 years

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A major breakthrough came in 1987 when Ashkin used the tweezers to capture living bacteria without harming them, the Academy noted.

Ashkin made his discovery while working at AT&T Bell Laboratories from 1952 to 1991.

Meanwhile Mourou, 74, and Strickland won for helping develop a method to generate ultra-short optical pulses, "the shortest and most intense laser pulses ever created by mankind," the jury said.

Their technique is now used in corrective eye surgery.

Mourou was affiliated with the Ecole Polytechnique of France and the University of Michigan in the US, while Strickland, his student, is a professor at

the University of Waterloo in Canada.

Mourou was also involved in building the Extreme Light Infrastructure (ELI) project and what is believed to be one of the world's most powerful lasers, the Apollon, in developments that researchers hope will one day help deal with nuclear waste, treating tumours and clearing debris in space.

WOMEN ARE 'OUT THERE'

Speaking by phone to the Academy, a moved Strickland said she was thrilled to receive the Nobel prize that has been the least accessible for women.

"We need to celebrate women physicists because they're out there... I'm honoured to be one of those women."

Before her, only Marie Curie and Maria Goeppert Mayer had won the physics prize, in 1903 and 1963 respec-

tively.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences has in the past lamented the small number of women laureates in the science fields in general.

It has insisted that it is not due to male chauvinism bias on the award committees, instead attributing it to the fact that laboratory doors were closed to women for so long.

"It's a small percentage for sure, that's why we are taking measures to encourage more nominations because we don't want to miss anyone," the head of the Academy, Goran Hansson, said yesterday.

Last year, US astrophysicists Barry Barish, Kip Thorne and Rainer Weiss won the physics prize for the discovery of gravitational waves, predicted by

Albert Einstein a century ago as part of his theory of general relativity.

On Monday, two immunologists, James Allison of the US and Tasuku Honjo of Japan, won this year's Nobel Medicine Prize for research into how the body's natural defences can fight cancer.

The winners of the chemistry prize will be announced today, followed by the peace prize on Friday. The economics prize will wrap up the Nobel season on Monday, October 8.

For the first time since 1949, the Swedish Academy has postponed the announcement of the 2018 Nobel Literature Prize until next year, amid a #MeToo scandal and bitter internal dispute that has prevented it from functioning properly.