

DEMANDS AND GOALS

Oikyafront to brief foreign envoys today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Oikyafront leaders will brief foreign diplomats about its seven-point demand and 11-point goal today.

The newly formed alliance leaders will also explain its position on the country's current political situation, especially the election atmosphere.

Gonoforum President Dr Kamal Hossain, on behalf of the combine, will brief the diplomats and hand them a statement, said alliance leaders.

The alliance has already invited all diplomats stationed in Dhaka to the programme which would be held at 3:00pm at a city hotel.

"We will brief diplomats about our goals and demands," Mahmudur Rahman Manna, convener of Nagorik Oikya, which is a component of the Jatiya Oikyafront, told The Daily Star.

Several leaders of the alliance held a meeting at BNP chairperson's Gulshan office around 9:30pm yesterday and announced their coming programmes.

"We have decided in the meeting

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Banker killed

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the three-wheeler and forced it under a truck in front. The three inside were wounded critically.

The police official said the trio were rushed to the CMCH where the on-duty doctors declared Azim dead.

Miftaiddin, manager of IBBL's Khatunganj branch, said Azim and his two other colleagues used to come to the office together by CNG-run autorickshaw.

Fakhrul Islam Taslim, nephew of Azim, said Azim's son is an MBA student at Chittagong University and his daughter is an HSC second-year student.

"The accident occurred due to bus driver's negligence. It's not an accident; rather it's a murder," said Fakhrul, adding that they would file a case against the driver.

After the accident, police seized the bus from the spot, but the driver managed to flee, said Jahir Hossain, inspector (investigation) of Double Mooring Police Station.



Emergency services workers help injured persons after a fatal attack at a college in the port city of Kerch, Crimea, yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Crimea college attack kills 19

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their safety.

However, the Investigative Committee, the state body that investigates major crimes, said later that it was re-classifying the case from terrorism to mass murder.

Russia annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014, prompting international condemnation and Western sanctions, but since then there have been no major outbreaks of violence there.

Many of the victims from yesterday's attacks were teenage students who suffered shrapnel and bullet wounds.

Pupils and staff described scenes of mayhem as panicked pupils tried to flee the building. They said the attack had started with an explosion, followed by more blasts, and a hail of gunfire.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, at a meeting in the southern Russian resort of Sochi with his Egyptian

counterpart, declared a moment's silence for the victims.

"This is a clearly a crime," he said. "The motives will be carefully investigated."

'BODIES EVERYWHERE'

The director of the school, Olga Grebennikova, described the scene that she encountered when she entered the college building after the attack.

"There are bodies everywhere, children's bodies everywhere. It was a real act of terrorism. They burst in five or 10 minutes after I'd left. They blew up everything in the hall, glass was flying," Grebennikova told Crimean media outlets.

"They then ran about throwing some kind of explosives around, and then ran around the second floor with guns, opened the office doors, and killed anyone they could find."

Officials had previously given the death toll as 18, but the Committee revised that to 19 killed. An employee

at Kerch's hospital said dozens of people were being treated for their injuries in the emergency room and in the operating theatre.

Anastasia Yenshina, a 15-year-old student at the college, said she was in a toilet on the ground floor of the building with some friends when she heard the sound of an explosion.

"I came out and there was dust and smoke, I couldn't understand, I'd been deafened," she told Reuters. "Everyone started running. I did not know what to do. Then they told us to leave the building through the gymnasium."

"Everyone ran there... I saw a girl lying there. There was a child who was being helped to walk because he could not move on his own. The wall was covered in blood. Then everyone started to climb over the fence, and we could still hear explosions. Everyone was scared. People were crying."

Photographs from the scene of the

blast showed that the ground floor windows of the two-storey building had been blown out, and that debris was lying on the floor outside.

Emergency services teams could be seen in the photographs carrying wounded people from the building on makeshift stretchers and loading them on to buses and ambulances.

A second pupil at the college, who gave his name as Sergei, said he had taken a few steps out of the building into the street when the first blast went off. He was hit by debris from the blast and injured in the leg.

Sergei, 15, told Reuters he ran to another building, but said he could hear more explosions going off every few seconds. He took cover and after the attack was over, he was taken to hospital in an ambulance.

"I arrived at the hospital, the scene there was awful. They're bringing in people all covered in blood, some with arms missing, some with legs missing."

Thorny issues remain thorny

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At an EC meeting on Monday, Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukder sought to place a proposal about army deployment, but he was not allowed and no discussion on the matter took place.

The use of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM) appears to be another thorny issue.

The EC's plan for using EVMs on a large scale sparked widespread debates and opposition parties vehemently oppose it.

The EC has yet to clear the cloud over the matter.

Meanwhile, the ruling Awami League men are already campaigning across the country well in advance although the opposition parties need permission from the police even to hold rallies.

In addition, thousands of BNP men across the country have recently been sued in hundreds of "fictitious" cases, putting them in the back foot.

Political analysts and opposition leaders described this as an "absence of a level playing field" for all political parties, which is key to a fair election.

"At the moment, the atmosphere is not congenial for a free and fair election," Mujahidul Islam Selim, president of the Communist Party of

Bangladesh, told The Daily Star.

In its election roadmap unveiled in July last year, the EC said the "countrymen are waiting for a credible election".

But will the EC be able to hold one such election?

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakawat Hossain thinks it will be challenging, given the complicated issues facing the Commission.

"It is a big question as to how the Election Commission will manage the situation if all major parties join the polls race. What will be the security measure? How will the polls-related complaints be resolved? How will the level playing field be ensured? We do not know as the Commission is yet to make its plan public," said Sakawat, a member of the EC that held the 2008 polls.

Prof Emajuddin Ahmed, former vice-chancellor of Dhaka University, also thinks the upcoming election will be challenging as a number of issues remain unresolved.

Prof Nizamuddin Ahmed, of Chittagong University, said the election this time would likely be inclusive, but the problem is people have little confidence in the EC.

Also, the EC may appear helpless given the politicisation of the administration, he noted.

JS POLLS SINCE RESTORATION OF DEMOCRACY, 1991			
YEAR	MODE OF GOVERNMENT	STATUS OF PARLIAMENT	INCLUSIVE/ NON-INCLUSIVE
1991 5th JS polls	Interim government led by Justice Sahabuddin Ahmed	Dissolved	Inclusive
1996 6th JS polls	BNP government led by Khaleda Zia	Dissolved	Non-inclusive
1996 June 7th JS polls	Caretaker government led by Justice Habibur Rahman	Dissolved	Inclusive
2001 8th JS Polls	Caretaker government led by Justice Latifur Rahman	Dissolved	Inclusive
2008 9th JS Polls	Caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed	Dissolved	Inclusive
2014 10th JS Polls	Awami League government led by Sheikh Hasina	Not dissolved	Non-inclusive

"The weakness of the Election Commission may create problem for the entire electoral system," Nizamuddin added.

For the first time in 2014, a parliamentary election was held without dissolution of the then parliament. The BNP-led alliance and some other parties boycotted the election which appeared a one-sided game with 153 MPs out of the 300 getting elected uncontested.

Voting was held in only 143 seats, and the EC did not face much difficulties to hold the election.

But this time, the situation is different as the BNP-led alliance is preparing to contest the polls, while also demanding a nonpartisan administration, among other things.

Health Minister Mohammed Nasim, also coordinator of the AL-led 14-party alliance, said there was no political crisis over the next parliamentary election.

"If anyone sees any crisis centring on the national election, it is their own problem. Free and fair elections were held in the past. This time too, the election will be free and fair," Nasim, also a presidium member of AL, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The AL and the BNP, who lead two major political alliances, may also face some challenges in sharing parliamentary seats with their partners. Many party nomination-seekers would have to make sacrifice to keep the alliance partners happy.

Also, both parties have multiple aspirants in most constituencies. The situation is more difficult for the ruling party as it has faced intra-party conflicts in some constituencies where its grassroots leaders took stance against ALMPs.

Prof Al Masud Hasanuzzaman, who teaches government and politics at Jahangirnagar University, said, "As the ruling party, the Awami League is taking some advantage, running election campaign in advance. The BNP is yet to mobilise public support in favour of its demands. So we will have to wait until the announcement of the election schedule to clearly understand how the polls will be held."

Mahbub under fire

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The development comes amid demands from the BNP-led alliance and newly-launched Jatiya Oikyafront to recast the entire EC for holding the upcoming national election, likely in late December, in a free and fair manner.

Opposition parties demanded the resignation of the chief election commissioner and other commissioners on several occasions in the past. But call for the resignation of an election commissioner from the ruling alliance appears rare.

"He [Mahbub Talukdar] holds a constitutional post. Holding that constitutional post, talking publicly about secret issues of EC meeting goes against the constitution," Mohammed Nasim, coordinator of the 14-party alliance, told a press conference after yesterday's meeting.

On Monday, Mahbub walked out of an election preparatory meeting for what he told reporters was not

being allowed to place his proposals on how to hold the polls in a free, fair, and inclusive manner.

Mahbub claimed he wanted to speak on five issues, including how to use the army in the election, find ways to ensure level-playing field for all parties and increase EC's capabilities to exercise its power, at the commission's meeting.

"Mahbub Talukdar cannot make such comments on Election Commission's meeting. He should resign as he violated his oath of secrecy," said Nasim, a presidium member of the AL.

It is to be noted that although the chief election commissioner and four other election commissioners were sworn into office, they were not required to take the "oath of secrecy" like the prime minister and the other ministers.

When his attention was drawn to the matter later in the day, Nasim

said, "He [Mahbub Talukdar] cannot make such comments to the media holding a constitutional post.

"He is not a spokesperson for the EC. Only the spokesperson for the EC can talk to the media about the discussion of the EC meeting," he told The Daily Star over phone.

Dilip Barua, secretary general of Samayabadi Dal, a component of the ruling party-led alliance, said they discussed about Mahabub Talukdar at the meeting.

"He should make such comments only after resigning," Barua told The Daily Star.

'PROPOSAL UNCONSTITUTIONAL'

Mahbub's walkout from the EC meeting on Monday exposed a rift in the commission. That rift has apparently deepened. An election commissioner yesterday termed one of the proposals from Mahbub unconstitutional.

Kabita Khanam said there was no scope to place any government

department or ministry under the jurisdiction of the EC.

But Mahbub Talukdar proposed bringing the ministries of public administration and the home under the EC during the polls, she said, adding the constitution would not support that.

"Therefore, his proposal is unconstitutional," she told reporters at her office.

One of the written proposals prepared by Mahbub, which was to be placed before the EC's meeting on Monday, said many participants in talks with the EC last year proposed bringing the two ministries under the jurisdiction of the commission during polls. Some of them also proposed to bring the information, finance and LGRD ministries under the jurisdiction of the EC, he said.

"I think people's confidence in the election will increase if the two ministries -- public administration and

home -- are placed under the jurisdiction of the EC. This will contribute to holding the polls in a free and fair manner," Mahbub said in his written proposal.

Prior to his walking out of the Monday's meeting, Mahbub also submitted a note of dissent.

Kabita Khanam said the note of dissent may be given against a decision. But no decision was taken at that meeting, she added.

"Difference of opinion may be there in the EC. But it cannot be labelled as a rift," she said.

Mahbub Talukdar was appointed as an election commissioner in February last year, along with CEC KM Nurul Huda and three other election commissioners. The president made the appointment on recommendation of a search committee formed by the president. The search committee had held talks with political parties.

No one can halt our development

Says PM while opening new chancery complex in Riyadh; meets Saudi king

BSS, Riyadh

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said no one would be able to stop the pace of Bangladesh's development.

"It's my firm belief that no one will be able to halt this pace of uplift. Retaining the pace of this development is also the responsibility of you all," she said.

The PM was addressing a programme marking the inauguration of the newly constructed chancery complex of the Bangladesh consulate at the Diplomatic Quarters here.

Hasina reaffirmed her optimism that Bangladesh would be turned into a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed one by 2041.

About the next national election, the PM said the election process starts three months before the polls.

"We will stay in power if people vote for us, otherwise we won't. But we have accomplished the work which was very essential for the country's development."

On her meeting with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the PM said they had a good discussion.

She said the talks were held in a very

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KSA deports

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his employer didn't arrange iqama for him.

He said one of his relatives gave him Tk 1.5 lakh and with that money he secured an iqama. He could then work at a company as a construction worker for only one and a half months.

But police picked him up over a week ago as he stepped out of his home in Riyadh. He was sent to a detention centre in Dammam before being deported yesterday.

"I have returned broke. How will I recoup the money I have spent?" said a hapless Al-Amin.

Tanvir of the expatriates' welfare desk said some of the returnees overstayed their visas.

According to the desk, nearly 15,000 Bangladeshi migrants returned home from Saudi Arabia between January and August this year.

Tanvir, however, could not confirm how many of them had valid iqamas.

Some two million Bangladeshi migrants have been working in Saudi Arabia. The country has recently adopted a policy on recruiting more locals.

To make it happen, it has imposed levies on the companies hiring foreign workers and barred foreigners from taking up jobs in 12 types of businesses, including shops selling watches, optical materials, medical equipment, electrical and electronic products, car parts, building materials, carpets, and mobile phones.

Bangladesh embassy officials in Riyadh said the measures came as part of the Saudi government's economic and labour policy reforms to create more jobs for locals.

"The Saudi authorities are enforcing immigration laws in a more stringent way," Golam Moshi, Bangladesh ambassador to the Kingdom, recently told this correspondent.

Recruiting agents said a good number of Bangladeshis went to Saud Arabia on so-called "free visas". Such visas are arranged by Saudi companies, but the migrants need to find their jobs themselves.

"This sort of arrangement is illegal. That's one of the reasons why people having iqamas are being deported," said Abdul Alim, a recruiting agent.

No time limit

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people have started coming out to report the abuse faced by them as children, the Ministry of Women and Child Development said in a statement on Tuesday.

The Ministry of Women and Child Development had recently consulted the Law Ministry in view of the overriding provisions of the POSCO Act over other criminal laws and provisions of mandatory reporting of such offences.

"The Ministry of Law after examining the provisions of POCSO Act vis-à-vis provisions of CrPC has advised that there appears no period of limitation mentioned in Section 19 in regard to reporting of the offences under the POCSO Act, 2012. The POCSO Act does not provide for any period of limitation for reporting the child sexual offences," the statement said.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, came into force on November 14, 2012.

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 defines a child as any person below the age of 18 years and provides protection to all children under the age of 18 years from the offences of sexual assault, sexual harassment and pornography.

The development came at a time when the #MeToo movement is gathering force across urban areas of India.