

Fakhrul hits back at PM over comment on Tarique Rahman

UNB, Dhaka

BNP yesterday termed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's remark about its acting chairman Tarique Rahman "devoid of political etiquette".

"What the prime minister said about Tarique Rahman at her press conference is devoid of political norms. She has exposed her political vengeance through her comments," said BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir while talking to reporters after the PM's press conference.

Earlier in the day, Sheikh Hasina reaffirmed that the punishment BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman was given by court in various cases will surely be executed. She was speaking at a press conference at her official residence Gono Bhaban, about the outcome of her recent tri-nation visit.

Replying to a question by a journalist about the update over government efforts to repatriate Tarique, the PM said, "I hate to take this name."

Tarique, who was declared a fugitive by Bangladesh courts, has been sentenced up to life in jail in several cases, on charges of money laundering, corruption and the August 21 grenade attack on an Awami League rally.

On September 11, 2008, Tarique went to London for treatment, and has been living with his family there since then.

He was arrested on March 7, 2007 during the army-backed caretaker government, and later released on parole on September 3, 2008.

COUNTRY GOING THROUGH PERILOUS TIMES: RIZVI Earlier in the day, BNP senior joint general secretary Ruhul Kabir Rizvi Ahmad said the country is now going through "perilous times".

Speaking during a press conference at BNP's Nayapaltn central office, Rizvi also criticised Information Minister Dr Hasan Mahmud for what he said was a "false" statement involving BNP with a petrol bomb-like object found at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

"People at home and abroad know Bangladesh is now going through a dark phase of democracy, where fair election and freedom of expression have disappeared. The country is now seeing widespread incidents of killing, rape and extrajudicial killing," he said.

Referring to media reports, the BNP leader said 41 children were raped in the first eight days of May while five people are being subjected to extrajudicial killing every day on an average.

NIKO GRAFT CASE Hearing on petition to change court resumes today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will resume hearing today on a writ petition filed by BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, challenging legality of a government notification that said the Niko corruption case trial against her will be held at a special court in Keraniganj Central Jail.

The petition has been included in today's cause list of the HC bench of Justice Farah Mahubub and Justice Md Khairul Alam for hearing.

On May 28, the same bench held a hearing on the petition and adjourned it until today.

On May 13, the law ministry issued a gazette notification, saying that trials of 17 cases, including the Niko graft case, against the BNP chairperson will be held at a special court set up at building-2 in Keraniganj jail for security reasons.

Khaleda filed the petition on May 26.

Trial of Niko graft case was being held at a special court set up inside the old Dhaka central jail while trials of the 16 other cases were taking place at a makeshift court at Government Alia Madrasa in Bakshibazar.

Khaleda landed in jail on February 8 last year after being sentenced to five years' imprisonment in Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

City yet to be in work mode after five-day Eid vacation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ever-so-busy capital is yet to regain its usual state, as city dwellers are still returning after five days of Eid-ul-Fitr vacation.

All offices -- including government, semi-government and private ones, banks and other financial institutions -- reopened yesterday after the holidays. Festive mood was prevailing at most offices.

Most shopping malls, business centres, schools, colleges and universities, however, were not open and will take a few days to resume operations.

For some, the vacation extended to nine days, as many holidaymakers took leave for two days -- June 2 and 3 -- leading up to the official Eid holidays starting from June 4.

This year, officials enjoyed a five-day vacation, as weekly holiday (Friday and Saturday) was added to the three days of Eid. Many have taken additional leave to spend more time with their families.

Attendance at the Secretariat, the administrative hub of the country, was thin as many officers and employees did not turn up. Those who showed up at work were seen exchanging pleasantries and Eid greetings with colleagues.

Officials said, operations at government offices will resume in full swing within a few days.

The atmosphere at Finance Ministry, Economic Relations Division and other related departments, however, is different as staff of those offices are busy in budget-related activities.

The regular schedule of office (9am to 5pm) resumed on Sunday



Usually packed with vehicles, Shapla Chattar in Motijheel -- the commercial hub of Dhaka -- is almost deserted on the first working day after Eid holidays.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

after being curtailed for the month of Ramadan.

Dhaka's commercial hub Motijheel, kitchen market in Karwan Bazar, and entry point Jatrabari were not buzzing with people and commuters as seen on regular work days.

Traffic at the otherwise busy intersections including Farmgate, Mohakhali, Shahbagh and Gulistan was also sparse yesterday.

City dwellers who did not leave the capital still got to enjoy a Dhaka free of traffic congestion, noise and crowds yesterday.

Amusement parks in the city are still packed with visitors as people with their family members went there to have a good time. People also thronged movie theatres to enjoy Eid releases on the big screen.

Dhaka-bound buses, trains and launches were overloaded with people returning to the capital after celebrating Eid back in their home districts.

The journey of holidaymakers was somewhat hassle-free compared to the recent past as there were fewer gridlocks and sufferings on the highways.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Police Commissioner Md Asaduzzaman Mia yesterday greeted his colleagues, lauding their outstanding performance in discharging duties during the Eid vacation.

"Around two crore city dwellers could enjoy the Eid holidays in peace because of your sincere and utmost professional service. There was no lack of security. No major crime took place during this long vacation," he said at an Eid reunion in DMP headquarters yesterday morning.

PHOTO OF THE DAY

PRABIR DAS



Rickshaws parked in a perfect criss-cross bear testament that Dhaka is yet to get back to its chaotic self, as many rickshaw pullers are still enjoying a vacation, much like others. The photo was taken at Tejgaon Industrial Area yesterday.

Subsidy in gas sector to rise if price not adjusted

Says state minister for power, adds it could cost govt Tk 7,000 crore per year

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

State Minister for Power and Energy Nasrul Hamid yesterday insisted on increasing gas price, to reduce the burden of subsidy in the sector, which now stands at Tk 5,000-6,000 crore a year.

"We have to adjust gas prices, and we are saying that again and again," he said while briefing reporters at the secretariat about the latest situation in the power and energy sector.

In March, the government sent a proposal to Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) to increase gas price, and it was now up to the commission to make a decision, he added.

The government started importing liquefied natural gas (LNG) in August last year in the face of falling domestic production.

Since then, the government has spent Tk 14,000 crore to subsidise the import, he said, adding that the price of imported gas was much higher than that produced locally.

"If we do not adjust the price, we have to provide subsidy for the additional cost. Even after the adjustment, we will have to subsidise it," he said.

Gas production cost stands at Tk 14 per cubic metre, after the imported LNG is mixed with the locally produced gas. At the moment, the government sells it at Tk 7.17.

Responding to a question, Hamid said

the subsidy cost would rise to Tk 7,000 to Tk 8,000 crore in coming years, if the price was not adjusted.

On March 11, state-run Petrobangla and its six distribution companies -- Titas, Bakhrabad, Jalalabad, Pashchimanchal, Karnaphuli, and Sundarban -- proposed hiking the price of gas to Tk 12.19 per cubic metre. But it was rejected following fierce resistance by consumers and experts, who said it would hit the economy, make businesses uncompetitive and fuel inflation.

Meanwhile on March 31, the High Court in response to a petition filed challenging the legality of the public hearing, remarked there would have been no need to increase gas prices even if half of the corruption in Petrobangla and Titas was reduced.

The court had also asked why Bangladesh should purchase the gas for \$10 while India purchased the same quantity for \$6.

The HC bench of Justice FRM Nazmul Ahasan and Justice KM Kamrul Kader had also asked the BERC to submit a report about gas price before it.

"There is no legal scope for increasing gas price at the moment as the BERC cannot raise prices twice in a single fiscal year under the law," M Shamsul Alam, energy adviser to the Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said at the time.

The energy regulator then hinted that it might raise the price at a rate lower than that proposed by the distributors.

'This parliament was not elected by people's mandate'

BNP's Rumeen Farhana says after taking oath as MP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP's lawmaker-elect from reserved seats for women in the parliament, Rumeen Farhana, yesterday took oath as MP of the 11th parliament.

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury administered the oath at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. Parliament Secretariat's Senior Secretary Dr Zafar Ahmed Khan conducted the ceremony.

Talking to reporters after taking oath, Rumeen said she wants a "representative government" to be formed as early as possible through a participatory election as "the current parliament was not elected with people's votes".

"Taking oath as an MP for the first time is certainly a matter of elation for me. But I am embarrassed because the parliament I am representing was not elected by people's mandate. This parliament has no connection with the people of Bangladesh," she said.

"Since formation of this parliament, I have been saying that this [parliament] is illegal. I'm still saying this unequivocally. I'll be happy if my tenure as MP does not last over one day," she said.

Asked why she took oath as an MP of a parliament while labelling it "illegal", BNP's lone female MP said she did it to use the platform [parliament] to speak for her party, the country and its people since the democratic space for raising voice is ever-shrinking.

Rumeen hoped that they will be given adequate time to speak up in the parliament without considering the number of seats the party has.

She said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia is eligible to get bail in the cases filed against her, but she has been kept in jail -- depriving her of her legal rights.

Rumeen also said Khaleda Zia has been subjected to political vengeance. "I'll surely talk about the issue in the parliament."

Fifty seats, reserved for women, are allocated among political parties in proportion to their number of MPs.

BNP, which has five MPs in the House, got one reserved seat and picked Rumeen, its assistant international affairs secretary and daughter of Language Movement veteran Oli Ahad.

She filed her nomination on May 20, and the Election Commission declared her elected from the reserved seat on May 28.

INFO ON BUDGET JS to open help desk for lawmakers

BSS, Dhaka

The Jatiya Sangsad (JS) secretariat will launch a budget information help desk tomorrow to assist lawmakers in delivering their addresses at the first budget session of the 11th parliament.

With cooperation of Budget Analysis and Monitoring Unit (BAMU), the parliament secretariat will set up the desk at Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban, said an official release yesterday.

The secretariat has taken the initiative for providing assistance to lawmakers for delivering their addresses on the budget issues, it said. Lawmakers can collect important information from the help desk before addressing the session.

The desk will help SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



GREETING GLUT... posters of leaders and activists of political parties remain plastered on the entirety of this boundary wall of Dhaka City College in Dhanmondi, conveying Eid greetings. Other than being an eyesore, putting up posters beyond designated places is a punishable offence. This photo was taken on Saturday, the last day of Eid holidays.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN