

KILLINGS OF BANGABANDHU, 4 NAT'L LEADERS

Conspirators will be tried some day: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Someone in future will surely find out the real conspirators behind the brutal murders of August 15 and November 3 in 1975, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday.

"We may not be able to try these conspirators. We will try to do that. History cannot be erased. In the future someone will surely catch these conspirators [behind the killings of August 15 and November 3]. That [day] will come. This must be done," she said.

The prime minister said this while addressing a discussion organised by Awami League at the city's Krishibid Institution marking the Jail Killing Day.

On this day in 1975, the killers of Bangabandhu stormed into the Dhaka Central Jail in the early hours and assassinated the four national leaders -- Tajuddin Ahmed, Syed Nazrul Islam, Captain Mansur Ali and AHM Quamruzzaman -- who led the Liberation War in the absence of Bangabandhu in 1971 and snatched the victory for the nation.

Sheikh Hasina, also the president of Bangladesh Awami League, presided over the discussion.

She said the ongoing drive against terrorism, militants, drugs and corruption will continue.

"Unjust and injustice will be eliminated from Bangladesh. The people of the country will have an improved socioeconomic status, and they will lead a beautiful life."

The prime minister said the sacrifice of millions of freedom fighters and martyrs cannot go in vein. "It did not go in vein, no one will be able to make it futile in the coming future either," she said.

She said razakars, al-badrs, al-shams, killers of 1975 and their companions and patrons would not get the chance to make Bangladesh their den again.

"For this, the people of Bangladesh have to think like that way. No reign of terror can be established in this country again. The pace of development and democracy must continue. We must build the Golden Bangladesh," the prime minister said.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and senior Awami League leaders pay respect to the four slain national leaders at a programme yesterday marking the Jail Killing Day in the capital's Krishibid Institute Bangladesh.

PHOTO: BSS

RELOCATION OF ROHINGYAS TO BHASHAN CHAR

Plan 'uncertain' after UN doubts

AFP, Dhaka

Government yesterday said plans to relocate thousands of Rohingya living in overcrowded refugee camps to Bhashan Char were "uncertain" after authorities failed to gain support from UN agencies.

Dhaka had wanted to begin its long-held plan this month to move 100,000 people to the mud-silt island of Bhashan Char, as frustration grows with the presence of the squalid tent settlements in its southeastern border towns.

Bangladesh has said thousands of Rohingya families have volunteered to relocate, with some 3,500 of the Muslim minority due to be moved between mid-November to February during calm seas.

But the plan was in doubt as the UN has not supported the relocation so far, Bangladesh disaster management and relief minister Enamur Rahman told AFP.

"This has become uncertain," Rahman said of the relocation to the island, which takes around three hours to reach by boat.

"They (UN agencies) still haven't agreed to the relocation plan."

Aid agencies including the UN refugee agency UNHCR, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the World Food Program (WFP), which held meetings with the government, told him the island was "isolated" and "flood-prone".

The agencies set out a list of conditions that had to be met, including a regular shipping service

between the islet in the Bay of Bengal and the mainland, Rahman added.

The organisations provide humanitarian aid to the nearly one million Rohingya in the vast camps, including 740,000 who fled a military crackdown in Myanmar in August 2017.

UNHCR spokesman Louise Donovan yesterday told AFP his agency offered "to engage constructively" with Bangladesh but said the relocation had to be "voluntary".

"To evaluate the safety and sustainability of life on Bhashan Char, the UN has also emphasised that it will be essential to undertake independent and thorough technical assessments before relocations take place," Donovan said in an email.

She added that the assessments would look at the risks of natural disasters, adequate water supply and access to basic services -- such as health and education -- and "their ability to move within Bhashan Char and to and from the mainland".

Dhaka is due to hold another round of talks with the agencies on Wednesday, Rahman said, adding that "we won't do anything forcefully".

Global activist group Fortify Rights said last month it interviewed 14 Rohingya at three camps, including some who appeared on lists of refugees allegedly willing to go, and found none had been consulted "and all opposed it".

Other groups have also expressed misgivings about moving people to the island, which is regularly hit by devastating cyclones.

WHATSAPP 'SNOOPING' ROW IN INDIA

Opposition leaders' 'phones hacked'

Priyanka, Mamata among victims of 'BJP government's surveillance'

AGENCIES

The political controversy in India over the WhatsApp snooping row intensified yesterday, with the Congress claiming that the phones of three opposition leaders -- including Priyanka Gandhi Vadra -- were hacked by the government.

On Saturday, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee made a similar claim. The other leader who came forward, the Congress said, was Praful Patel, a former Union minister from Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party.

Indian media reports said 20 activists, lawyers and journalists were informed by WhatsApp recently that their phones were compromised for two weeks in May.

"When WhatsApp sent messages to all those whose phones were hacked, one such message was also received by Priyanka Gandhi Vadra," senior Congress leader Randeep Surjewala told reporters yesterday afternoon.

Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's team claimed she did not take the message seriously and had deleted it. Only when Surjewala forwarded her the message from WhatsApp that was received by targeted users, she remembered she did receive one such message, sources said.

Last week, Facebook, the parent company of WhatsApp, alleged that Israeli cybersecurity company NSO

used WhatsApp servers to spread spyware Pegasus.

Among the 1,400 users targeted across 20 nations were 121 Indian journalists, activists, lawyers and senior government officials, who were spied on for a two-week period in April before the national elections.

The Indian Express reported WhatsApp confirmed a number of Indian users had been targeted by the Pegasus spyware, which installed itself on their devices and relayed back data to the hackers.

New Delhi has asked WhatsApp to "explain the kind of breach and what it is doing to safeguard the privacy of millions of Indian citizens," information and technology minister Ravi Shankar Prasad wrote on Twitter, denying the government had used the malware to spy on its citizens.

But opposition leaders accused the government of invading citizens' privacy.

"A government that spies on journalists/activists/Opposition leaders and treats its own citizens like criminals has lost the right to lead in our democracy," Surjewala said in a tweet on Friday.

Facebook has sued NSO, which claimed that its products were licensed only to "vetted and legitimate government agencies".

Claiming the BJP government has been "exposed", the Congress levelled

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Users denied quality service

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carriers and cell tower companies, said carriers.

Subscribers are the ones suffering due to the whole affair, they said.

Many carriers' capacity, especially in cities, has been exhausted and they cannot serve their customers quality service, they said.

The carriers are serving 16.26 crore active connections with 28,000 towers across the country. Of the active subscribers, 9.24 crore use mobile data.

Grameenphone, the largest carrier, and cell tower company edotco had reached an agreement following the Tower Sharing Licencing Guidelines formulated by the BTRC.

According to Grameenphone officials, it submitted the deal to the BTRC for approval on July 14.

"Instead of approving the negotiated and agreed SLA [service level agreement] which solves the issue, the BTRC has been trying to impose a non-negotiated common commercial agreement on the operators. This action by the BTRC is contrary to the Tower Sharing Licensing Guidelines and principles of fair competition and it affects all parties concerned," said a Grameenphone official.

Through the common commercial agreement, the BTRC is killing competition, mobile operators complained.

When the BTRC started the negotiations, Grameenphone walked out of the meeting stating that it was illegal.

The BTRC has already drafted the common agreement after meeting other players in the industry. It fixed high monthly charges for sharing the towers.

Carriers are now sharing towers for charges starting from Tk 41,000 a month for rooftop ones and Tk 55,000 for ground-based ones. In the draft

common agreement, the BTRC fixed Tk 65,000 and Tk 85,000 respectively.

The mobile operators had asked the BTRC not to fix the charges and leave it to bilateral negotiations. In a meeting last week, Prime Minister's ICT Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy also asked the BTRC to do the same to ensure competition.

Robi said it was very unfortunate that the regulator chose to intervene by framing the agreement on behalf of carriers and the tower companies going beyond the scope of the tower guidelines.

"This is clearly inconsistent with the guidelines and as a result, even after a year of issuing tower company licenses, the country has managed to have only a couple of towers being set-up by the tower companies," said Shahed Alam, chief corporate and regulatory officer at Robi.

The pricing framework proposed by the regulator is commercially unviable for Robi, Shahed said.

"When the tower companies were issued licence, the objective was to bring efficiency to this aspect of the telecom business by lowering the cost of availing tower services. Rather than reducing cost, the regulator's proposal will increase our existing cost," he said.

Asked, BTRC Chairman Md Jahurul Haque said, "I have no idea about the Grameenphone and edotco's draft SLA."

"I am not sure, but may be our team is considering the whole picture and that's why they wanted to solve the problem through a common SLA. We have noticed problems between mobile operators and the tower companies. The mobile operators are very demanding. That's why we went for this process."

"Tower companies had a deadline of May to start setting up towers but they could not do that for this reason.

We went there to mediate between the tower companies and the mobile carriers."

Carriers were approved to establish only the two towers since November last year.

One of them was in the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban area and the other at Khaliajuri of Netrakona, hometown of Telecom Minister Mustafa Jabbar.

A Grameenphone official said they have 279 "critical towers" and that they needed new towers there but did not get BTRC's permission.

Banglalink had sought the regulator's approval to replace 54 of its towers but was denied.

To offer quality service, carriers need sufficient spectrum and good number of towers. But since spectrum price is very high, operators try to manage the situation by establishing plenty of towers, said insiders.

Grameenphone in a statement said, "Our rollout of new sites is stopped, and our customers are suffering."

Tower companies also acknowledged the problem. They said it was difficult to reach a deal with the carriers.

"We can understand the situation and unfortunately there is no other way. This situation will continue for the next few months," said Imran Karim, chairman of Kirtankhola Tower Bangladesh.

He said the regulator has stepped in and that there was a solution on the table. He hoped they would be able to start building towers within a few months.

Asked why the process was taking so long, he said a lack of confidence could be the issue. "Mobile operators could be a little uncomfortable with the new telecom business system."

Karim also hoped that the challenges would be overcome within the first quarter of next year.

Labour court grants bail to Prof Yunus

JnU CORRESPONDENT

A labour court in Dhaka yesterday granted bail to Nobel Laureate Dr Muhammad Yunus after he had surrendered before it seeking bail in five cases filed over sacking five employees of Grameen Communications.

Acting chairman of Dhaka Third Labour Court Zakia Parveen passed the order.

The same court exempted Prof Yunus from personal appearance in the cases after his lawyer submitted separate petitions.

But the court asked him to be present during the hearing on charge framing in the cases.

On July 3, three former employees of Grameen Communications -- Abdus Salam, Shah Alam and Emranul Haque -- separately filed three cases against the company's Chairman Prof Yunus, Managing Director Naznin Sultana and Deputy General Manager Khandaker Abu Abedin with the court as they were sacked in June for their roles in forming a trade union at workplace.

Two other staff of the company -- Abdul Gafur and Hossain Ahmed -- were sacked on the same charges in July.

They filed two more cases against the three on August 26.

Naznin Sultana and Abu Abedin were earlier granted bail in the cases.

Advocate Mustafizur Rahman Khan, a defence lawyer, told The Daily Star that the five employees used to work for Grameen Communications on a contractual basis.

"As their contracts were not renewed, they went on to file the cases," the lawyer said.

The sacked employees, however, claimed that they were terminated as they wanted to form a trade union.

The court on October 9 issued an arrest warrant for Prof Yunus as he failed to appear before it despite an earlier summon order.

On October 28, the bench of Justice Moyeenul Islam Chowdhury and Justice Khandaker Diliruzzaman of the High Court ordered the government not to harass or arrest Prof Yunus until November 7 following a writ petition filed by Yunus's brother Dr Muhammad Ibrahim.

The HC, however, asked him [Prof Yunus] to surrender before the trial court at any convenient time by November 7.

Meanwhile, Grameen Communications yesterday in a statement said the question of terminating the staff does not even arise as all of their employees, including those who had filed cases, were hired on a contractual basis.

"The application made for forming the trade union in Grameen Communications was rejected by the Registrar, as contractual employees cannot form a trade union," the statement said.

So the question of terminating them on charge of forming trade union does not arise, it said.

Correction

Our caption under the photo of a man with a white cane published yesterday wrongly mentioned that the man's name is Mir Arshedul Karim.

Actually, the man's name is Mohammad Sarower Hossen Khan.

We regret the mistake.

Two teens raped in Khulna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

A Khulna court on Saturday sent three teenagers to a juvenile correction centre on charge of gang-raping a 17-year-old girl in the city's Khalishpur area On October 29.

The three were sent to Khulna Juvenile Correction Centre, said Sabbirul Alam, officer-in-charge of Khalishpur Police Station.

The OC said one of the boys had an "affair" with the victim. On the day of the incident, he called the girl and asked her to meet him at an orchard in the locality.

When the girl arrived, the three raped her, the OC said, adding that a woman in the neighbourhood rescued the girl after hearing her screams.

Following a case filed by the victim's mother with Khalishpur Police Station on Saturday, police detained the three from different areas in the city.

Meanwhile, police arrested three people in a case filed over allegedly raping a ninth grader in Khulna's Sonadanga upazila.

The arrestees, Bashir Howladar, 22, Kabir Howladar, 48, and Ashfaq Hossain, 28, are residents of the upazila, said Bidhan Chandra Roy, sub-inspector (SI) of Sonadanga Police Station.

The SI said the victim had an "affair" with Bashir, who is already married and has a son.

On October 21, Bashir brought the girl to a house in the upazila with a promise to marry her and "raped" her several times till October 30, SI Bidhan said, quoting the case statement.

The other two accused helped him in "deceiving the girl", said the SI, who is also the investigation officer of the case.

BNP may take part

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the EC.

Talking to The Daily Star after the commission's announcement, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said, "Ours is a democratic party and it is important for us to participate in elections. We have decided in principle to take part in all the elections to local government bodies."

He, however, said it was impossible for the current EC to hold a free, fair and acceptable election. "They don't have the ability to hold such an election."

The BNP standing committee would make a final decision on joining the Dhaka city polls, Fakhrul said.

After the December 30 parliamentary election, the party boycotted the DNCC mayoral by-polls in February this year. It also did not participate in the upazila elections held between March and July, saying it did not see any prospect of a free and fair election.

The BNP even expelled some leaders and activists over contesting the upazila polls in violation of its decision.

The opposition party, however, contested the by-polls to Bogura-6 on June 24. It also participated in eight upazila elections on October 14.

AL READY FOR POLLS

The AL is ready to contest the two city polls. Its Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif said their organization, as a democratic party, always remains ready to contest any election.

"We are making preparations for contesting the polls to Dhaka city corporations," he told this newspaper.

SM Faisal Chisti, a presidium member of Jatiya Party, said theirs is a pro-polls party. "We are preparing

for the city polls. We will nominate candidates for the mayor and councillor posts."

Communist Party of Bangladesh President Mujahidul Islam Selim, also a top leader of the Left Democratic Alliance (LDA), said they were yet to discuss the city elections.

Zonayed Saki, another LDA leader and also the chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon, said his party would make a decision on contesting the elections only after its registration issue is settled by the EC.

"The High Court on June 26 had ordered the Election Commission to register our party within 30 days, but the commission is yet to comply with the order," said Zonayed, who contested the last DNCC polls in 2015 as an independent mayoral candidate.

The LDA did not participate in the DNCC mayoral by-polls and upazila elections.

Asked about the registration of Ganosamhati Andolon, EC Senior Secretary Md Alamgir said they would soon take necessary measures in this regard after scrutinising the party's documents submitted to the commission.

Tenures of the two city corporations will expire on May 11 and May 14 next year respectively.

According to the Local Government (city corporation) Act-2009, polls should be held within 180 days before the expiry of the tenure of an incumbent mayor. The tenure begins from the day of holding the first meeting of a city corporation.

The last polls to the two city corporations were held on April 28, 2015. The first meeting of the DNCC was held on May 12 and that of the DSCC on May 15 that year.