

MINISTERS IN AL COMMITTEE

Presidium asks Hasina to decide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The newly-constituted Awami League presidium, the highest policy-making body of the party, yesterday left it to AL President Sheikh Hasina to decide whether seven ministers would be included in the 81-member central executive committee.

The seven, among the 12 ministers who were in the previous committee, do not feature in the partially-formed Awami League Central Working Committee, which was announced during the AL's triannual council held between December 20-21.

Party insiders, at the time, said they viewed the move as an effort to separate the party from the government, although four ministers were selected in the central committee.

Presidium members yesterday discussed the issue of the seven minister's at their first meeting held at the Gono Bhaban in the capital yesterday night with Hasina in the chair, said sources.

The members gave Hasina the responsibility to take the decision in this regard.

The seven ministers of the Hasina-led 47-member cabinet, who were not named in the committee yet, are Housing and Public Works Minister SM Rezaul Karim, its former legal affairs secretary;

'Stunned by DU VC's biased role'

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deep shock at the brutal attack on Nur and others. They demanded exemplary punishment of the culprits.

Meanwhile, DU students yesterday put forward a three-point demand.

The demands include resignation of DU proctor for his failure to protect the students, recovery of the CCTV footage of the attack, and immediate trial of the attackers.

The demands were declared at a programme organised under the banner of Santrash Birodh Chhatra Oikya at the base of Raju Memorial Sculpture.

A number of teachers, journalists and politicians expressed solidarity with the demands.

Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan, associate professor at DU's international relations department, said, "The university authorities and the proctorial team did not take proper steps to stop the attack even though they were informed.

"It is clear that the attack was a play jointly staged by the authorities and the Chhatra League."

Former Ducus VP ASM Abdur Rob, Mujahidul Islam Selim, Mahmudur Rahman Manna, Aman Ullah Aman, renowned Photo Journalist Shahidul Alam, Convener of Gono Samhati Andolok Zonayed Saki and Jahangirnagar University teacher Prof Said Ferdous also spoke at the programme.

Coveted promotions

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He pointed out that the post of senior secretary was created only to make bureaucrats happy and increase their financial benefits.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder too said he didn't find any rationale behind the promotion.

"A promoted official should be given a considerable time to hold his or her new post to serve the people," he said.

Referring to the promotion order which said it was issued in public interest, he asked, "How will the people when they are to retire immediately after getting promotion?"

According to the last pay scale announced in 2015, the basic salary for the highest grade is Tk 78,000 (fixed).

A senior secretary gets Tk 82,000 (fixed). The cabinet secretary and the principal secretary or those in equivalent posts enjoy special grade and get Tk 86,000 (fixed).

Former US adviser warns of 'imminent' N Korea risk

AFP, Washington

Former US national security adviser John Bolton on Monday sharply criticized President Donald Trump's North Korea policy, warning that the Asian country posed an "imminent" threat.

"The risk to US forces & our allies is imminent & more effective policy is required before NK has the technology to threaten the American homeland," tweeted Bolton, who was dismissed in September amid growing disagreements with Trump, particularly regarding his North Korea policy.

The erstwhile advisor, a longtime hawk on North Korea, was openly skeptical of the 2018 summit between

Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, former finance secretary of the party; three former organising secretaries in the previous committee; State Minister for Shipping Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury, Deputy Minister for Water Resources AKM Enamul Haque Shamim and Deputy Minister for Education Mohibul Hasan Chowdhury; State Minister for Religious Affairs Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah, former religious affair secretary; and State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Fazilatun Nessa Indira, former women affairs secretary.

Four ministers -- Obaidul Quader, road transport and bridges minister; Adbur Razzaque, agriculture minister; Dipu Moni, education minister; and Hasan Mahmud, information minister -- were elected in the central executive committee.

Hasina was elected AL president for the ninth consecutive time, while Quader was elected her deputy for his second term.

After the meeting, Quader told reporters at Gono Bhaban gate that the full committee would be announced on Thursday.

Following the council, AL elected 42 office bearers in the 81-member central working committee, while names of the other 11 office bearers and 28 members are yet to be announced.



A baby Jesus is being placed in the nativity scene at a church in Ramna yesterday as preparations are almost complete for the Christmas Day service.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Smugglers of zero line

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the same amount."

A wooden slope is set up on the border fence to push a bike onto Bangladesh side after the border is found secure.

"We used to smuggle around eight to 10 bikes almost daily but the situation is tougher now after police arrested six of our members," he said.

This newspaper talked to some other sources, including syndicate members, and some locals who bought smuggled bikes, to get an insight into the illegal trade.

If any customer wants to get a licence number and registration, the smugglers handover the bike to another group working in Cumilla and Chunrurhat in Habiganj, close to Brahmanbaria.

This group removes the chassis number and replaces it with the number of an officially imported bike that was sold from an authorised shop. For this, they collect sale reports from showrooms.

For the entire process regarding the so-called licence and registration, the smugglers take additional Tk five to seven thousand. The customers would get some forged papers alongside a number.

On Indian side, the syndicates sometimes register a bike using a local's ID card -- known as Aadhar. Then a complaint is filed with a police station claiming that the bike was stolen, said a Bangladeshi youth, who is linked with the syndicate.

"They file the complaint so that they can get their bike back if it is seized by border guards, claiming it to be a lost property," he said, requesting not to be named.

The Daily Star could not independently verify this claim.

Lt Col Iqbal Hossain, commanding officer of BGB-60 Battalion, told The Daily Star that most of the motorbikes that run in the district are smuggled from India.

"We have received the complaint and will add information of this complaint to the previous case," he added.

As the documents are not checked properly, there is an increasing tendency among youths to buy smuggled bikes, he observed.

"We often get information about the smuggled motorbikes but the smugglers kept those in the houses built on zero line. We have no authorisation to conduct drives there," said the commanding officer.

"We often express our concerns to our counterparts at flag meetings."

Sources working for law enforcement agencies say the syndicates mainly use Hakor, Badla, Madla and Bayek border points to smuggle in the bikes.

According to sources working for law enforcement agencies, one of the rackets is run by Wasim Miah of Ganganager village and Hosen Miah of Ramchandrapur village in Cumilla. Shipon Miah of Gourangona area in Kusba is working closely with the duo.

Some other syndicate members in Brahmanbaria are Jahir Miah of Gopinathpur village, Billal Member of Dhojanagar, Rubel Mastar and Sadek Sarder of Nayanpur Bazar and Kamal Mia of Madla village.

Apart from police sources, local political leaders confirmed these names but none of the alleged smugglers were available for comments.

Md Lukman Hossain, officer-in-charge of Kusba Police Station, said they were trying their best to identify the syndicate members. "We also warned police officials to work sincerely as stern action will be taken if anyone of them is found guilty."

Replies to a query, Lt Col Iqbal refused the allegation of BGB men being involved in smuggling. He said they always remain active and conduct drives whenever they found information.

THE ARREST

According to police, six people, including four Indian nationals, were arrested on May 11 after they entered

Bangladesh for a bike consignment.

The arrestees were identified as Amzad Hossain Shawon, 22, and Hasibul Hasan Anik, 19, of Bangladesh, and Sanjat Devnath, 23, Nirmolendu Chowdhury, 32, Sankar Sarkar, 31, and Bimol Das, 33, of India.

Police also recovered one pistol, two pipe guns, six magazines, two walkie-talkies with a charger, one reflective vest, three pairs of leg guards and one pair of hand gloves from them.

Abdul Karim, the then assistant superintendent of police (ASP) of Kusba circle, said the gang used walkie-talkies as mobile network didn't always work properly at the border.

ASP Karim, who got transferred to Kusba on October 27, in a statement had said Shawon was a professional smuggler accused in two cases including one for murder. The Indian nationals were also professional smugglers.

But, claimed a local source close to law enforcers, police submitted the charge sheet in a hurry on July 26, without explaining these details to save other syndicate members in Bangladesh.

ASP Karim refuted the claim. He told The Daily Star on October 10 that police did not find any other people's involvement, so they submitted the charge sheet against only the six. "We needed to submit the charge sheet within 60 working days as required by the law."

Sources said police arrested the six following a lead they got while investigating a murder that took place on Kusba border on February 26.

Mazharul Islam Tanim, 30, was killed because of internal feud of a smuggling racket, said Sub-Inspector Md Faruk, the investigation officer of the case.

"We have found involvement of nine people behind the killing and three are already in custody," he said.

It's BCL men in garb of Moncho

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apparently has no political affiliation.

The Moncho's Vice-president Mohammad Shamim is an activist of Chattogram University BCL.

Besides, the platform's Office Secretary Mehedi Hasan Shanto is a member of Bijoy Ekator Hall BCL. Members Al Riad, Imran Sarkar, Touhidul Islam Mahim and Mahbub Hasan Niloy are activists of different BCL hall units at Dhaka University.

At least 20 top leaders of the Moncho's different units have affiliation with Chhatra League's politics, said sources.

In this October, the Moncho was split into two factions following an internal feud. One of the factions is led by Bulbul and Mamun.

The other faction, led by convenor Prof Jamal, on October 21 declared a seven-member committee, which also has current and former BCL leaders.

This faction's president, Mizanur Rahman Pukul, is the deputy environment affairs secretary while Vice-president Shariful Hasan Shovo is the president of the Law Faculty BCL at the university.

CONFLICTS WITHIN MONCHO

After the Prof Jamal-led convening body announced the central committee of the Moncho in October last year, Mehedi Hasan, son of a freedom fighter, brought allegation of financial irregularities against the teacher and claimed to be the convenor himself.

Prof Jamal refuted the allegation.

After the platform was split in two this October, one faction announced a separate committee for the Dhaka University. Bulbul and Mamun became the president and general secretary of the faction's DU unit.

On October 10, Prof Jamal expelled Bulbul and Mamun from the organisation due to their anti-organisational activities. On the same day, the two issued a press release declaring that they were still holding the posts of the central committee.

Four days later, the two came up with a new statement saying they expelled Prof Jamal from the Moncho.

On October 20, the faction, led by Bulbul and Mamun, swooped on some Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activists at Madhur Canteen on the DU campus, leaving five JCD activists

injured.

The other Moncho's faction, led by its convenor Jamal, padlocked Ducus VP Nur's office at the Ducus building on December 4, demanding the VP's resignation. They made the move after an unverified audio clip allegedly involving Nur went viral.

On December 17, at least 15 people were injured as the Bulbul-Mamun led faction carried out an attack on Nur and his supporters while they were staging protest on the DU campus against India's NRC and Citizenship Amendment Bill. Nur and his men carried out an counterattack, leading to a clash.

Five days later, the same faction, mostly including BCL men, swooped on the Ducus VP and his followers again. This time, the Moncho activists attacked Nur and his supporters at his office at the Ducus building. This left 17, including Nur, injured. Some of them were being treated at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

On Monday, law enforcers arrested three Moncho leaders, including Mamun and Mehedi Hasan Shanto, for their alleged involvement in the attack.

Russia extends detention of US man in spy case

AFP, Moscow

held "hostage" for a possible prisoner exchange.

On Monday, US charge d'affaires Bart Gorman and diplomats from Canada, Ireland, and Britain visited Whelan in Moscow's high-security Lefortovo prison, bringing him food and Christmas greetings from family and supporters.

"It's two days before Christmas. A holiday Paul Whelan will spend alone in Lefortovo," the US embassy quoted Gorman as saying.

"In the past 12 months, Paul has not heard his parents' voices. Bring Paul some Christmas cheer and let him call home."

Whelan, a former US marine, maintains he has been framed and

that he took a USB drive from an acquaintance thinking it contained holiday photos.

His lawyer Vladimir Zherebenkov has said the acquaintance that handed over the drive is the only witness against Whelan while the rest of his longtime acquaintances in Russia gave witness statements in his defence.

During a previous court hearing in October, Whelan insisted that he was not a spy.

"Russia thought they caught James Bond on a spy mission, in reality they abducted Mr Bean on holiday," he has said.

Whelan and his supporters claim that the American has been mistreated in jail.

Biman's 787 'Achin Pakhi' arrives

UNB, Dhaka

Biman's brand new Boeing 787-9 Dreamliner "Achin Pakhi" arrived in Dhaka from Seattle, USA, last night.

The aircraft, which left Boeing Everett Delivery Centre at 2:30pm (local time), landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 8:19pm, said Tasnim Akhtar, public relations manager of Biman.

The Dreamliner was named by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Biman's first and second Dreamliners -- "Akash Beena" and "Hangsabala" -- arrived in August and December last year. The third one -- "Gaangchil" arrived in July, "Rajhansa" in September and "Sonar Tori" in December this year.

Hong Kong marks Christmas Eve with clashes and tear gas

AFP, Hong Kong

Hong Kong marked Christmas Eve with tear gas and mall clashes yesterday night as battles between democracy activists and riot police swept through a major shopping district.

The evening's unrest was the most sustained in what has otherwise been a few weeks of comparative calm for a city upended by more than six months of violent protests.

Thousands of black-clad protesters -- some wearing Santa hats and reindeer antlers -- took to the streets of Tsim Sha Tsui, a usually bustling tourist district.

Clashes soon erupted with riot police firing multiple rounds of tear gas to disperse protesters throughout the evening, including outside the famous Peninsula Hotel.

Police said a "large group of rioters" had built barricades, damaged traffic lights and dug up bricks on the area's major thoroughfares.

Meanwhile, flashmob rallies were held in multiple malls across the financial hub, with protesters chanting anti-government slogans.

In Harbour City, a luxury mall, police used pepper spray and batons when a group of plainclothes officers were discovered and surrounded, an AFP reporter on the scene said.