

'Radical changes the only way'

JSD places plan for interim govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) yesterday proposed an interim government plan called the "national government", which will encompass representatives of all political parties.

The plan is similar to what then Jasad proposed in 1972, the "national revolutionary government", said JSD president ASM Abdur Rab while placing the plan at its programme at Jatiya Press Club.

"The government has proved that it doesn't believe in any neutral election model. They are using the Election Commission to fulfil their personal interests."

The national government will radically reform the constitution based on the fundamental spirit of the Liberation War -- equality, human dignity and social justice -- said Rab, an organiser of the Liberation War.

The proposed government will work to revive the constitutional institutions, establish rule of law, release political prisoners, form an independent EC and hand over power to elected public representatives.

It will form a constitutional commission to make the reformation, bring back "referendum", and democracy will be established as the only rule of governance.

Power of the PM and president will be balanced. A clause will bar anyone from becoming the PM after they complete two consecutive terms. The government will ensure separation of judiciary and administration, decentralisation of power, and self-ruled local governments.

- Proposed govt will form commission to reform constitution
- Commission will bring back 'referendum'
- Democracy will be established as only governance rule
- Power of PM, president will be balanced
- Nobody will serve as PM after two consecutive terms
- Judiciary will be separated from admin

The formation, outline and tenure will be fixed by the national agreement.

Though JSD proposed the plan, attendants said they are certain that the current government will not accept it.

"We have to create enough pressure on the government to follow the proposal. And all opposition parties should agree with the minimum agenda of the proposed government," said Mostafa Mohsin Montu, president of a faction of Gonoforum.

Chief coordinator of Ganosamhati Andolon Zonayed Saki said another election won't bring liberty from the current situation.

Convener of State Reform Movement Advocate Hasnat Quaiyum said the 1972 constitution couldn't fulfil national interest.

General Secretary of Biplabi Workers Party Saiful Haq, Jahangirnagar University's Prof Abdul Latif Masum, and former Ducusu vice president Nurul Haque Nur joined the event among others.

Form polls-time govt

Khelafat Majlish urges president; successive govts failed to enact EC formation law, Tariqat leaders say quoting Hamid

RASHIDUL HASAN

Khelafat Majlish yesterday demanded that the president take initiative to form an election-time government to hold national polls in a free, fair and acceptable manner.

A seven-member delegation of the party said this while holding a dialogue, over formation of the next Election Commission (EC), with President Abdul Hamid at Bangabhaban.

The president also held talks with Bangladesh Tariqat Federation, which is a part of the ruling Awami League-led alliance, at his official residence yesterday.

At the dialogue, Hamid regretted that all successive governments since independence failed to enact a law, in line with the constitution, on formation of the EC, according to party leaders.

Hamid yesterday held the two separate meetings with the parties as part of his ongoing dialogue process with registered political parties on formation of the next EC.

'TRANSITIONAL GOVT AHEAD OF POLLS'

Emerging from the hour-long meeting around 6:00pm, Ahmad Abdul Kader, secretary general of Khelafat Majlish, told reporters that the political and administrative culture of Bangladesh has reached such a stage that it is

be made to the constitution," the party said.

"By amending the constitution, a non-partisan, neutral election-time interim government must be formed, which will merely act as a 'supervisor', meaning that it will only carry out day-to-day work of the government and provide overall assistance to the Election Commission in the conduct of elections."

In its five-point proposal, Khelafat Majlish also proposed to enact a law, in line with the constitution, to strengthen the EC, and bring ministries of public administration, home affairs, and law under the EC, after announcing the election schedule.

'GOVTS FAILED TO ENACT EC' Meanwhile, after the dialogue with the president around 5:00pm, Tariqat Federation Chairman Syed Nazibul Bashara Maizvandari, who led a seven-member delegation, told reporters that the president regretted when they raised the issue of successive governments failing to enact a law on EC formation.

"The president expressed the same opinion as us and supported our proposal, that a law should be enacted as soon as possible."

Quoting Hamid, Nazibul said the president told them that questions will not arise if the law is enacted.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



DIALOGUE WITH PRESIDENT

almost impossible to hold a fair, free and neutral election under a partisan government.

"The experience of the past tells us so. Only a handful of national elections held under a caretaker government have been widely recognised as neutral. No election before or since has been recognised as free and fair. Therefore, in the current reality, it is necessary to form an election-time government," he said.

In a written proposal submitted to the president, Khelafat Majlish, which quit the BNP-led 20-party alliance on October 1, called upon Hamid to take measures to dissolve the parliament before holding national elections.

"If necessary, amendments should



Mahfuz Anam elected ANN chairperson

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, has been elected as the next chairperson of Asia News Network (ANN).

ANN is a regional alliance of 23 leading news organisations across South Asia and East Asia. The announcement was made by the body in a press statement yesterday.

In addition to The Daily Star, the other organisations include Dawn from Pakistan, China Daily from Hong Kong and China, The China Post from Taiwan, The Statesman from India, The Jakarta Post from Indonesia, The Kathmandu Post from Nepal, Philippine Daily Inquirer from the Philippines, The Straits Times from Singapore, The Island from

SEE PAGE 5 COL 2

LAUNCH FIRE TRAGEDY



Siblings Hafsa, Sumaiya and Fazlul wait outside Barguna Circuit House with pictures of their missing parents and brother.

Hafsa set to get married, albeit with a heavy heart

SOHRAB HOSSAIN, Patuakhali

The eldest daughter of Pakhi Begum and Abdul Hakim, passengers of MV Abhijan-10 who went missing since the tragic launch fire, Hafsa (18) is set to get married on Friday.

Her parents had gone to Dhaka along with their one-year-old son Nasir Ullah to shop for Hafsa's wedding. They had planned to return home and set the date for Hafsa's marriage.

Their three children Hafsa, Sumaiya and Fazlul Karim told this correspondent in a despondent voice while standing in front of the circuit house in Barguna yesterday noon, with pictures of their missing family members in hand.

Hafsa's grandmother Farida Begum said despite searching relentlessly, they are yet to trace the missing trio.

Hafsa's uncle Nazrul Islam said the future of Hafsa, Sumaiya and Fazlul has become uncertain following the tragedy. "If we could find their bodies, it would bring us some solace," he said.

Meanwhile, another launch passenger Jahanara Begum, an assistant teacher at North Kismat Srinagar Government Primary School in Mirzaganj of Patuakhali, has also gone missing since the tragic launch fire. Her husband Selim Akon is undergoing

SEE PAGE 4 COL 3

It was too much, even for the strongest

Professionals recount their side of the story



A man breaks down in tears as he tries to describe a loved one, who tragically perished in the MV Abhijan-10 launch fire, to a forensic team from Dhaka. This photo was taken yesterday from Barguna District Hospital in Barishal.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

HABIBUR RAHMAN, Pirojpur

Professional duties called numerous people to Jiakul village and neighbouring areas in Jhalakathi. The areas are adjacent to the Sugandha river, where MV Abhijan-10 caught fire early Friday, resulting in 42 deaths and over hundred cases of injury.

Tanvir Ahmed, a journalist of private television channel Jamuna TV, went to collect information of the accident from Pirojpur. Speaking to this newspaper, he said in his 13 years in journalism, he is yet to see a worse incident.

"After reaching the spot, I broke down mentally seeing the horrific

scenes all around. Living passengers with burn injuries, ashes of those burnt to death, distraught relatives, the area had the makings of a bad nightmare," he said.

"I would've surely lost it, if not for my professional responsibilities, as I knew it was my duty to cover the incident for the media," he said.

Khan Aktheruzzaman Shohag, a Pirojpur based videographer who went to the spot to record videos of the tragic accident, said "I could only keep working because of my years in this profession, otherwise I wouldn't be able to keep my calm and grind my way through all the terror that befell me."

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Water, water everywhere, but not a drop to fight a fire

NIZAMUDDIN AHMED

My philosophy, after any tragic fire incident, is to forget it, and rather concentrate on similar conditions that pose threats in the future. Because the fact of the matter is, many potential killing machines are waiting in our waters.

Tazreen happened in 2012. Almost a decade has passed since 117 workers died, because they could not escape the deadly fire that broke out in that factory building. Factories with restricted escape routes exist to this day.

Hazardous buildings with pathetic structures, made of inferior materials, have not disappeared after the fall of Rana Plaza in 2013. The death of over a thousand people could not teach us a lesson.

After the Nimtoli explosion in 2010, in

internal engine explosions, and an alarm system. Will it be the last steel skeleton to remain afloat with the cabins burnt to ashes?

The only glimpse of positivity after the tragic death of 42 people last Friday is the dawn of how terrifying a fire on a water vessel can be, and how helpless we all are. The saddest part is that although smoke and fire were observed early, the untrained and ignorant crew did not know any better to prevent the ultimate escalation. Is there a different brand of crew on other river crafts?

The ship did not have a shred of means to fight the growing heat and fire, nor did it have enough life-jackets and boats to evacuate the mortified people. The "sarangs" (masters and drivers) did not have the presence of mind to veer the ship to the riverbank. They could have saved countless lives had they yielded to the pleas

No one has awakened to the impending peril. Hundreds of launches like Abhijan-10 are still plying; many are much worse. But negligence persists among hundreds of launch owners, thousands of operators and millions of travellers.



which 124 people died, old city dwellers were certain that lightning never strikes in one place twice. True to the myth, Churikhata blew up in 2019, claiming 71 fatalities.

MV Abhijan-10 is not the only riverine vessel that had unprotected steel, flammable paint, highly combustible materials, engine emitting unusual noises and smoke, and exploding gas cylinders. It's not the only vessel without detectors for fire, smoke and

of the helpless passengers. This was due to the launch not having a dedicated team to take over during such emergencies. Does any other launch have them?

Unbelievably, the launch travelled for an hour while on fire. Panic overtook common sense. The crew lacked emergency training and were not advised well by the onshore management, who must have been

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

4 held with 11kg gold at Sylhet airport

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Four people were detained with 11.22kg of gold by customs officials at Sylhet's Osmani International Airport yesterday.

The detainees are Sheikh Mohammad, Zahid, Maqbool Ali, and Sultan Mahmud.

The gold, worth Tk 7 crore, was recovered from the luggage of four passengers after a Biman flight from Dubai landed at Sylhet airport at 9:00am, said Mohammad Al Amin, deputy commissioner of Customs, Excise and VAT Commissionerate.

It was concealed inside electric appliances.

"The gold was melted and cast into the shapes of the appliances. During the scanning, these gold castings showed a dark spot similar to the coils of the appliances," the deputy commissioner added.

The recovered gold will be handed over to Bangladesh Bank, the official said.



In the quest for reconstructing the Dhanmondi Sobhanbagh Mosque, the old structure has been demolished recently. Laden right onto the open road, with no fences in place to contain the rubble, the deconstructed site poses safety concerns for commuters using the busy street. This photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A CONTRACT OF TK 2.8CR

DB arrests 14 so far over question paper leak

MUNTARIM SAAD

An organised syndicate leaked the question papers of recruitment tests for five state-run banks in a contract of Tk 2.80 crore, an arrestee said in his confessional statement.

A team of detectives arrested Mizanur Rahman Mizan (37), an investor in the capital market, from Dhaka's Hatirjheel area on Sunday in this connection.

Shahadat Hossain, additional deputy commissioner of DB (Tejgaon), told The Daily Star that Mizan's name came up in the confessional statements of Jahangir Alam Jahid, a stenotypist at a Rangpur court and Rabiul Islam Robi, president of Peshajibi League in Rangpur -- who were arrested on December 13.

DB arrested 14 people, of whom eight, including Mizan, confessed before a Dhaka court so far.

During previous recruitment tests, Mizan acquired question papers from his relative Rashed Ahmed Bablu and gave those to Jahid and Robi.

Bablu and Mizan came to an agreement about the question papers of the five state-run banks in return of Tk 35 lakh, according to Mizan's statement.

Mizan offered to trade the papers to Jahid for Tk 1.20 crore. Jahid then offered to trade them to another suspect named Sohel for Tk 2.80 crore.

He paid Tk 20 lakh to Mizan in advance, from which Mizan paid Tk 6.25 lakh to Bablu.

Bablu sent the questions to Mizan via a messenger app around 9:00pm on November 5, who then forwarded them to Jahid.

When Mizan asked Bablu about his source, Bablu mentioned Mubin's name as his associate.

Following the leak, Bangladesh Bank had to cancel preliminary tests for hiring 1,511 cash officers in five state-owned banks.