

PM laments lack of strong opposition

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed her frustration for not having a strong opposition in the country as the two main opposition parties, created by military rulers, don't have a base among the mass people.

She said this at a views exchange meeting with the officials of the Prime Minister's Office.

The three-and-a-half hour meeting was held at the PMO with Hasina in the chair.

Regarding the BNP and Jatiya Party, she said both were created by the military dictators, who grabbed the state power defying the Constitution. "They don't have any interest in the country and its people," she said.



Students of Dhaka University's Faculty of Fine Arts busy making colourful masks with motifs from the Bangla heritage for the celebration of Pahela Baishakh on Thursday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BNP demands probe into 'law minister-adviser convo'

Files complaint with ACC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has demanded that the Anti-Corruption Commission probe a leaked conversation allegedly between the law minister and an adviser to the prime minister over a government project.

It also demanded the ACC disclose the names of those who had laundered money abroad.

Syed Moazzem Hossain Alal, the party's joint secretary general, along with Taiful Islam Tipu, its assistant office secretary, submitted two letters with the demands to the anti-graft body yesterday.

Talking to reporters later, Moazzem said, "We've recently learned about a leaked conversation between Law Minister Anisul Huq and Salman F Rahman. It [the conversation] is sensational and it primarily gives proof of the highest level of corruption.

"We have asked them [ACC] to carry out a vigorous investigation. We'll help them [if needed]."

On the other hand, Awami League leader Khandaker Mohtesam Hossain

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'Tens of thousands' killed in Mariupol

Claims President Zelensky, accuses Russia of slowing evacuations

AGENCIES

Ukraine said yesterday that tens of thousands of people have likely been killed in Russia's assault on Mariupol and Russian forces have slowed down evacuations from the besieged southeastern city, where conditions are desperate.

"Mariupol has been destroyed, there are tens of thousands of dead, but even despite this, the Russians are not stopping their offensive," President Volodymyr Zelensky said in a video address to South Korean lawmakers.

Reuters has confirmed widespread destruction in Mariupol but could not verify the accuracy of his estimate of those killed in the strategic city, which lies between Russian-annexed Crimea and eastern areas of Ukraine held by Russian-backed separatists.

If confirmed, it would be by far the largest number of dead so far reported in one place in Ukraine, where cities, towns and villages have come under relentless bombardment and many bodies, including of civilians, have been seen in the streets.

The head of the Russia-backed

self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, Denis Pushilin, told Russia's RIA news agency yesterday that more than 5,000 people may have been killed in Mariupol. He said Ukrainian forces were responsible.

Petro Andryushchenko, an aide to the mayor of Mariupol, said on the Telegram messaging service that numbers of people leaving the city had fallen, not because people

"Mariupol has been destroyed, there are tens of thousands of dead, but even despite this, the Russians are not stopping their offensive."

did not want to escape but because Russian forces had slowed pre-departure checks.

Around 10,000 people were awaiting screening by Russian forces, he said. Russia does not allow military personnel to leave with civilian evacuees. There was no immediate comment from Moscow, which has previously blamed Ukraine for blocking evacuations.

Zelensky also said yesterday that thousands of Russian troops were massing for a new offensive in the east, and Russia said it would not halt its military operation in Ukraine for any further peace talks.

British intelligence said Ukrainian forces had already repulsed several Russian assaults in eastern regions. Meanwhile, US President Joe Biden and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a virtual summit yesterday, clouded by US frustration over New Delhi's neutral stance on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, reports AFP.

New Delhi has raised concerns in Washington in particular by continuing to buy Russian oil and gas, despite pressure from Biden for world leaders to take a hard line against Moscow.

The United States has already warned that any country that actively helps Russia to circumvent international sanctions will suffer "consequences."

Yet this has not deterred India from working with Russia on a rupee-ruble payment mechanism to enable existing trade obligations in the wake of sanctions imposed on the Kremlin.

Save us from dishonest deep tube-well operators

Aggrieved farmers write to PM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Aggrieved farmers in Rajshahi yesterday appealed to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for saving them from dishonest deep tube-well operators of Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA).

They forwarded a memorandum to the PM through Rajshahi Deputy Commissioner Md Abdul Jalil.

In the memorandum, they said the operators turned most of the deep tube-wells into tools for exploiting farmers because of lax monitoring by BMDA officials.

They added that the deaths of two Santal farmers in Godagari upazila by suicide for not getting water was the result of exploitation.

Around 500 farmers and their family members, mostly from different ethnic groups, also demonstrated on the DC's office premises.

They also laid siege to the BMDA office in Ambagan area, demanding removal of corrupt BMDA officials.

BCL man files complaint against teacher

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

A complaint has been filed against a college teacher in Rangpur over his alleged indecent Facebook post on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's comments.

Imran Hossain, 24, general secretary of ward-28 of Rangpur city unit Chhatra League, on Sunday night lodged the complaint with Tajhat Police Station accusing Delwar Hossain, 42, a teacher of information and communication department at Rangpur City College.

According to the complaint, Delowar made the post on April 8.

This correspondent could not contact the teacher for comments.

Nazmul Kader, officer-in-charge of the police station, yesterday said they sent the complaint to the Cyber Crime unit. Action will be taken after investigation, he said.

Five trawlers gutted at dockyard

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Five fishing trawlers were gutted in a fire that broke out at a dockyard in Barguna's Patharghata upazila on Sunday night.

The origin of the fire could not be known immediately, said Shahjahan Sikder, an official of Patharghata Fire Service Station.

Quader, owner of Maulana Abdul Quader dockyard, said, "I don't know how the fire broke out as I was not there at that time. Someone may have set it on fire over enmity."

The loss caused by the fire could be around Tk 1.5 crore, the fire service official speculated.

BTRC failing to stop hatred on Facebook

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Facebook?" the HC bench asked while hearing a writ petition regarding the issue.

It directed the authorities concerned to take necessary steps to remove the hateful contents from Facebook and stop their misuse.

The court also issued a rule asking respondents to explain in two weeks why their failure to prevent publishing, disseminating and spreading of despicable contents on Facebook should not be declared

illegal.

In the rule, the court also asked them to show cause why they should not be directed to regulate Facebook under Section 8 of DSA in order to stop circulation of such contents.

The BTRC chairman; secretary at the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunication and Information Technology; senior secretary at the public security division of the home ministry, director general of the digital

security agency and Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, owner of Facebook, have been made respondents to the rule, petitioners' lawyer Tapas Kanti Baul told The Daily Star.

The writ petition was filed by four citizens -- Saleem Samad, a senior journalist; Dr SM Masum Billah, a teacher of law department at Jagannath University (JnU); George Chowdhury, a Supreme Court lawyer; and Victor Ray, a leader of Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian

Unity Council -- in December last year.

A Facebook post on October 13 last year claimed that Hindus insulted the Holy Quran by placing it in a Durga Puja mandap. Videos and photos of the Holy Quran kept at a mandap in Cumilla were circulated widely on social media, mostly Facebook.

Later, communal attacks took place in 27 districts against Hindu establishments from October 13 to November 1, they said in the petition.

I forgive my students

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in exams after they failed.

"On March 20, some students kept prodding me with questions on religion. It was something I had never encountered before," he said yesterday.

"We normally don't have debates on religion and science in classroom. But those students began the centuries-old debate on creationism versus the theory of evolution... I then explained Darwin's Theory of Evolution to them.

"I told them religion is about belief but science is based on proof. But they are free to decide what they will believe."

It was not just one or two questions -- there was a concerted effort to spark an incendiary debate. "This has not happened in my classroom before."

Students usually don't bring mobile phones in his classroom as the device is not allowed there, Hriday said. "At one point of the debate I noticed four to five

students huddled together. They were laughing. I didn't release they were recording the conversation. Another group of students kept asking me questions."

Two days later, Hriday was called to the school office where he saw a member of the institution's managing committee sitting next to the headmaster. They asked him why he spoke ill about religion.

"I was accused of saying things which I did not speak. I told them to call the students and hear from them about the matter. They then told me to come back the next day. They told me I was in trouble and I should not go to the school unless asked to go there."

The next day began the attack on his house.

"I heard voices of adults and children. They were shouting at us. My children began crying in panic. We thought they would kill us," he said.

He called the school administration for help, but they came with a letter which said he has been suspended.

"The letter mentioned false allegations against me," he said.

At one point, police arrived at Hriday's house and took him to the nearest police station.

"I told everything to the law enforcers and they advised me to go to jail for my own safety. I was told that I would be charged with some minor offence, so that I can get bail easily. I agreed."

Later a case was filed against Hriday for "hurting religious sentiments" by an office assistant of the school.

The assistant had no issues with the teacher. He simply followed orders, found our correspondent there.

Hriday, however, was not told he was going to be charged under Sections 295 and 295 (A) of the

Penal Code. Both carry jail terms up to two years.

Section 295 criminalises vandalism of religious sites, while Section 295 (A) criminalises "deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Bangladesh, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations of insults, or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class".

"I did nothing of that sort. I did not vandalise any religious site," said Hriday.

But the truth did not matter -- what mattered to the angry crowds was that Hriday be thrown in jail.

The police apparently appeased them.

Hriday was released on bail on Sunday, after his lawyer proved in court that Hriday did not demean religion.

"This society needs science more than anything," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Deadly cost of freethinking

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Prof Azad died in Munich on August 12, 2004. Reviewing his death certificate, police in the charge sheet said that because of the wounds from the attack in February, Prof Azad suffered hypertension and his health was deteriorating -- which ultimately led to his death.

After his death, the case was turned into that of murder.

Inspector Kazi Abdul Malek of CID submitted a charge sheet to a Dhaka court on November 15, 2007 against five JMB men. But upon appeal by Azad's family, the court ordered reinvestigation.

The CID filed a fresh charge sheet on April 30, 2012 against four JMB men -- Salehin alias Salahuddin, Anwarul Alam alias Anwar, Mizanur Rahman alias Minhaz and Nur Mohammad. Of them, Salehin and Nur are on the run and the other two behind bars.

The investigators had found involvement of six other JMB leaders and activists including JMB chief Abdur Rahman and his second-in-command Siddiqui Islam Bangla Bhui, but the court acquitted them as they were either executed in other cases or killed in "gunfight".

In the face of massive crackdown and arrest and execution of top JMB leaders in the following years, the banned outfit's activities were largely contained.

But the IS-inspired militant group "Neo JMB"

and al-Qaeda-influenced Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT), also known as Ansar Al Islam, started carrying out targeted killings between 2013 and 2016.

ABT was responsible for the attacks on writer-bloggers, including Avijit, publishers and LGBT activists.

For the killing of Avijit, a tribunal in Dhaka on February 16 last year handed down death sentence to five militants and life imprisonment to another.

Those sentenced to death are Syed Mohammad Ziaul Haque alias Major (sacked) Zia, Akram Hossain, Abu Siddique Soheli, Mozammel Hossain and Arafat Rahman. Life imprisonment was handed down to Shafiur Rahman Farabi.

While the case is still pending with the High Court, Major Zia and Akram remain fugitives and the rest are in prison.

After the verdict, Bonya had said simply prosecuting a few foot-soldiers -- and ignoring the rise and roots of extremism -- does not mean justice for Avijit's death.

The US State Department on December 20 last year announced a \$5 million reward for information on the killing of Avijit Roy and the concurrent attack on his wife Bonya.

ABT also brutally killed Faisal Arefin Dipan of Jagriti Prokashani at his Shahbagh office on October 31, 2015. Dipan's company had published

Biswasher Virus (The Virus of Faith), by Avijit Roy in 2014.

The same day, Ahmedur Rashid Tutul of Shuddhashwar Prokashani, another publisher of Avijit's books, survived a machete attack by ABT men.

On February 10, 2021, a trial court handed down death sentence to eight ABT leaders and operatives, including Zia and Akram, in the Dipan murder case.

The appeals filed by the convicts and death references (lower court documents for confirmation of death penalties) in the cases filed for the killings of Avijit and Dipan, are now pending with the HC.

Supreme Court spokesperson Saifur Rahman said the hearings and disposals of the death references and appeals in the cases will be held gradually.

The spate of blogger killing began in 2013 with ABT men murdering Ahmed Rajib Haider near his Mirpur house on February 15 when the Shahbagh movement demanding capital punishment of war criminals was in full swing.

ADhaka court sentenced two ABT members to death and six other operatives to different terms in jail on December 31, 2015 over Rajib's killing.

The High Court upheld the trial court verdict on April 2 in 2017. Rajib's father Nazimuddin expressed disappointment over the High Court

judgment saying that he did not get justice.

"The eight accused in the case are self-proclaimed terrorists, but all of them did not get capital punishment," he said after the HC verdict.

The Supreme Court is yet to start the hearing on the appeals filed by the convicts challenging the HC verdict.

Science writer and blogger Ananta Bijoy Das was hacked to death at Sylhet city's Subidbazar on May 12, 2015. The Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Sylhet handed down death penalty to four ABT operatives on March 30 this year.

On March 30, 2015, blogger Oyashiquar Rahman Babu was attacked by three cleaver-wielding ABT members in the capital's Tejgaon industrial area. The case filed over his murder is under trial at a Dhaka court.

Trials of the cases filed over murders of two other bloggers -- Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy in the capital's Goran on August 7, 2015, and Nazim Uddin Samad in old Dhaka on April 6, 2016 -- are yet to begin. Police pressed charges against a number of ABT operatives in the cases.

Khurshid Alam Khan, a senior lawyer of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star that due to the long delay of trial proceedings of the cases witnesses lose their interest, evidence gets damaged and justice is hampered.