

BNP lawmaker Rashid tenders resignation to Speaker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP lawmaker Harunur Rashid submitted his resignation to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury at her office yesterday.

On December 11, five of the seven BNP MPs tendered their resignation to the Speaker as part of their anti-government movement with a 10-point demand that includes the dissolution of parliament.

The MPs who resigned that day were Md Zahidur Rahman of Thakurgaon-3, Md Mosharof Hosen of Bogura-4, Gulam Mohammad Siraj of Bogura-6, Md Aminul Islam of Chapainawabganj-2, and Rumeen Farhana, from women's reserved seats.

Harunur, who was from Chapainawabganj-3, was abroad at the time and Abdus Sattar Buiyan, the ailing MP of Brahmanbaria-2, tendered their resignations through email.

Later, the Parliament Secretariat issued a gazette notification declaring the seats of six BNP MPs vacant.

Harunur's seat, however, was not declared vacant as his resignation letter was not accepted because the JS secretariat was not sure his signature was on the resignation letter.

The seats of all seven BNP MPs are now vacant, according to the constitution.

Harunur told reporters yesterday that he appealed to other MPs from different political parties to resign from parliament to "restore democracy and the rule of law".

The EC on Sunday announced that it would hold by-polls in Thakurgaon-3, Bogra-4, Bogra-6, Chapainawabganj-2, and Brahmanbaria-2 on February 1, next year.

Asean envoy to attend 'informal' Myanmar meeting

AFP, Bangkok

A regional envoy tasked with solving the Myanmar crisis will attend an informal meeting in Thailand on Thursday, Cambodia said, with a Thai government source indicating the junta's foreign minister would attend.

The Thailand meeting comes shortly after the United Nations Security Council adopted its first resolution on Myanmar, demanding "an immediate end to all forms of violence".



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky gives a Ukrainian national flag to US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and US Vice President Kamala Harris (L) during his address to the US Congress at the US Capitol in Washington, DC, on Wednesday. Story on page 12. PHOTO: AFP

UNIVERSITY BAN

Afghan women stage street protest in Kabul

Some of them arrested by women police officers

AFP, Kabul

A small group of Afghan women yesterday staged a defiant protest in Kabul against a Taliban order banning them from universities, an activist said, adding that some were arrested.

In the latest move to restrict human rights in Afghanistan, the Taliban's minister for higher education on Tuesday ordered all public and private universities to bar women from attending.

"They expelled women from universities. Oh, the respected people, support, support. Rights for everyone or no one!" chanted the protesters as they rallied in a Kabul neighbourhood, footage obtained by AFP showed.

A protester at the rally told AFP "some of the girls" had been arrested by women police officers. Two were released, but several remained in custody, she added, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Around two dozen women dressed in hijabs, some wearing masks, could be seen raising their hands and chanting slogans as they marched through the streets.

Turkey yesterday urged Taliban rulers to

reverse their decision barring women from university education, calling it "neither Islamic nor humane."

"This ban is neither Islamic nor humane," Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu told a televised press conference.

"This ban is neither Islamic nor humane. We do not find it right. God willing, the [Taliban] will reverse this decision."

Turkish FM Mevlut Cavusoglu

"We do not find it right. God willing, the (Taliban) will reverse this decision," he said. "What harm does the education of women do to humanity?"

Women-led protests have become increasingly rare in Afghanistan since the Taliban took over the country last August, after the detention of core activists at the start of the year.

Participants risk arrest, violence and social stigma for taking part.

The women had initially planned to

gather in front of Kabul University, the country's biggest and most prestigious educational institution, but changed locations after the authorities deployed a large number of security personnel there.

Tuesday's late-night announcement triggered international outrage, with the United States, the United Nations and several Muslim nations denouncing it.

The ban caused disbelief, coming less than three months after thousands were allowed to sit for university entrance exams.

"Afghan girls are a dead people... they are crying blood," said Wahida Wahid Durani, a journalism student at the University of Herat, who was not at the protest.

"They are using all their force against us. I'm afraid that soon they will announce that women are not allowed to breathe."

Since seizing power, the Taliban have imposed many restrictions on women.

Most teenage girls are barred from secondary school, women have been pushed out of many government jobs, prevented from travelling without a male relative and ordered to cover up outside of the home, ideally with a burqa.

Police officer dies in road accident

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

An assistant sub-inspector of police died after a truck hit him in Rangpur's Mithapukur upazila yesterday.

The incident occurred in Paglarhat village around 7:00pm, when Aliul Islam, 35, of Mithapukur Police Station, was going to work on his motorbike from Gopalpur union.

He died on the spot, said Mostafizar Rahman, officer-in-charge of the station.

"The driver managed to flee. We are now trying to identify the truck," the OC added.

Abducted youths return home after three days

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Eight youths, who were abducted from a hilly stream in Cox's Bazar's Teknaf upazila on Sunday, returned to their families yesterday.

Locals claimed that the abductees were released around 2:30am yesterday after a ransom was paid to the kidnappers.

However, family members refused to comment on the issue.

The police do not have any information regarding the ransom, said Moshir Rahman, inspector of Baharchhara Police Investigation Centre.

"The abductors were compelled to release them as we were conducting drives and raids relentlessly to find and rescue the boys," said the inspector.

According to a family member, Nurul Mostafa, 20, and Karim Ullah, 34, fell sick as they were tortured by the kidnappers.

The other abductees were Absar Uddin, 22, Noor Mohammad, 24, Mohammad Ullah, 38, Selim Ullah, 32, Md Ridwan, 18, and Nurul Haque, 52.

Two die after being run over by train

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Railway police yesterday recovered the bodies of two men who were run over by a train in Tangail's Kalihati upazila.

Sagar, 35, and Sajeeb, 33, both traders by profession and residents of Pabna's Santhia upazila, were on their way to their hometown from Dhaka in a private car, said Fazlul Huq, in-charge of Tangail Railway Station.

According to locals, Sagar and Sajeeb were taking a stroll along the Joydebpur-Bangabandhu Bridge railway line in Hatia while their driver was working on the car, which was hit by another vehicle on the east side of the bridge.

The train hit them around 2:30am. The bodies were handed over to the family members after autopsy.

12 parties

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this fascist government," Mostafa said. He also said there was no scope for misunderstandings and "we all move together on the path of simultaneous movement".

The partners of the new alliance are: Jatiya Party (Kazi Zafar), Bangladesh Kalyan Party, Bangladesh Labour Party, Bangladesh Jatiya Dal, NDP, Bangladesh Liberal Democratic Party, Bangladesh Muslim League, Jamiyet Ulamaye Islam, Islami Oikya Jote, Jagga, Islamic Party, and Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal.

Of these, only Bangladesh Kalyan Party and Bangladesh Muslim League are registered with the Election Commission. Kalyan Party Chairman Syed Muhammad Ibrahim said before the disband, the 20-party alliance held its last meeting at the BNP chairperson's office on December 9 where the leaders decided not to use the 20-party combine name.

"But you can move forward after discussing amongst yourselves," he quoted a BNP leader as saying to them in that meeting.

"After such a statement, the 20-party alliance no longer exists. In fact, 10 days before that, the BNP secretary general told the media that 20-party alliance exists no more," he said.

Ibrahim said the 20-party alliance came into being on April 18, 2012, through a formal press conference and its dissolution was informal.

He said the BNP was the main guardian of the alliance. "Today our efforts are to support the BNP's 10-point demand and 27-point state reform proposals."

He said the new alliance was planning to go to the divisional cities after December 30, but a decision in this regard was yet to be made.

"We will join all programmes of the BNP as part of the simultaneous movement. We will bring out mass processions on December 30. We will gather in the Bijoy Nagar area around 2:00pm," he added.

Labour Party Chairman Mostafizar Rahman read out the declaration paper of the 12-party alliance.

"We have decided to participate in the ongoing anti-government movement to restore democracy and people's voting rights, and we will be recognised as 12-party alliance," said Mostafizar.

How could they dream of power?

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"Whenever election comes, their conspiracies increase.

"We have some intellectuals who are intellectually handicapped. I'm saying that the intellectuals are disabled because they don't see any development and always think about how to remove the Awami League from power."

"Is the BNP doing anything better for the country and its people for which it will gain the people's confidence and trust required to be voted to power again?" Hasina said, reports BSS.

She said since its inception, the BNP has been playing ducks and drakes with the people's voting rights, referring to Ziaur Rahman's "yes/no vote and parliamentary election to cling on to power which he grabbed illegally after violating the country's constitution".

The PM said his wife Khaleda Zia also held a farcical election on February 15, 1996, and no political party took part in the polls.

The people toppled the BNP government through movement after one and a half months of the election.

She added that there was an attempt to hold a general election in 2006 with a voter list of having 1.23 crore fake voters.

But the AL always comes to power with the people's mandate, the PM said.

AL General Secretary and Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, presidium members Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim and Kazia Zafarullah were present at the ALWC meeting, which was held as part of the preparation to hold the 22nd national council of the AL at the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan tomorrow.

At the beginning of the meeting, Hasina introduced the newly elected leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League and Jubo Mohila League.

'NO MAJOR CHANGE'

Meanwhile, Quader said there is no possibility of any major change in the AL committee which is scheduled to be announced at the council.

"We earlier told that there was little possibility of any major change in the committee that would be elected through this council," he said while talking to journalists at the council venue yesterday.

"We might hold the next council ahead of time after the next national election. There might be a major reshuffle then. Right now, we are not thinking of bringing any major changes. However, it will depend on the decision of the councillors."

About the party president post, he said, "The president post is indispensable; our president is the symbol of our unity. She is essential here. Not a single councillor can be found who does not want her."

On the general secretary post, he said, "Many leaders may have the desire to be the general secretary. The Awami League is a democratic party. As far as I know, there are at least 10 people who are qualified for the post."

"It [the decision of making the general secretary] will depend on the will of the Awami League president and opinions of the councillors. Everything will be clear in the second session [of the national council] ... So, I cannot name anyone at this moment."

Quader said, "We want to build an organised and united AL with the goal of building smart Bangladesh under the leadership of Sheikh Hasina. We are ready for the next election. We are ready to run the next government. Remain united and keep discipline is our message."

Asked about some controversial leaders, he said, "The incumbent executive committee is a very active committee. There are no controversial leaders. If any, the leader [Hasina] will decide."

Quader said this year's council is challenging because of the global crisis.

AL presidium members Jahangir Kabir Nanak and Abdur Rahman, Joint General Secretary Bahauddin Nasim, organising secretaries Mirza Azam and SM Kamal Hossain, Science and Technology Affairs Secretary Abdus Sabur, and central committee member Sanjida Khanam, among others, were present.

No possibility

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actions. The EC has to be neutral and that neutrality should be visible."

Another ex-CEC, ATM Shamsul Huda, at a dialogue with EC on June 12, said, "If all parties don't participate in this election, it won't be acceptable. How you will bring them to [participate in] the election depends on the power of persuasion."

In the same programme, former election commissioner Mahub Talukdar said, "If the election is not participatory, it will not be acceptable nationally or internationally."

The BNP and several other political parties have been pressing home a 10-point demand, including the formation of an impartial caretaker or interim government, which would form a neutral Election Commission to ensure a level-playing field for all parties. Stopping the use of EVMs was another demand.

Meanwhile, the CEC said by-elections to the parliamentary seats that fell vacant following resignations of the BNP lawmakers will be held through EVMs, but the commission does not have the financial support to install CCTV cameras at the polling stations in those constituencies.

The EC currently has the capacity to conduct elections with EVMs in 50 to 60 stations.

Renewables ignored

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If the government phases out diesel-fired power plants now, it would save \$2.5 billion in the first year, \$7 billion in the second year and \$6.3 billion in the third year. The government needs to invest \$16.2 billion for potential renewable energy, according to the CPD presentation.

Moazzem said it was a good thing that Jica engaged an institute to prepare the plan and conduct primary discussions with the civil society, academia, and think tanks.

"But more intensive discussions with stakeholders is needed before the plan is finalised."

He said interim report of the draft was better than the previous one. "But Thailand, Vietnam, Japan and Sri Lanka are moving ahead with even better plans."

Moazzem praised the

government's move to shut down all diesel power plants, allow the private sector to import oil and gas, and making announcements that schools would have rooftop solar panels and irrigation would be done with solar power instead of diesel.

He said it needs to be clarified whether these are for the crisis period or a long-term plan.

CPD Executive Director Fahmida Khatun said, "... It is possible to save a lot by ensuring good governance in the energy sector."

"The master plan should be prepared only with the interest of the people and the country in mind, not in the interest of any internal or external groups," she added.

Research associates of the study Helen Mashiyat Preoty, Shiyam Sadik and Moumita A Mallick also spoke at the event.

The old and vulnerable

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around the world. Billions of hours of farm work have been lost during high temperatures and global warming has damaged the ability to grow crops, said Prof Elizabeth Robinson, working group 1 lead of The Lancet Countdown, while presenting the global highlights.

In Bangladesh last year, 15,970 million potential work hours were lost in agriculture, 3,300 million in construction, and 2,400 million in manufacturing sectors, according to the report.

"Climate change is threatening people's health in Bangladesh. It is no longer a problem of the future; it is happening now and causing losses and damages every day," said Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on the Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

The rise in temperature will cause a major crisis of freshwater, he added.

The health issues should be on the climate agenda, he said.

Prof Saleemul Huq, director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, said, "We have already entered the era of loss and damage due to climate change. We need to find solutions, and multi-disciplinary collaboration is important."

Professor Emeritus Ainun Nishat said the issue of salinity across the coastal region has been missing in the Lancet countdown.

"Salinity has badly affected the health of the coastal people. The coastal region is the most vulnerable to climate change impacts... and in 30 years, Gopalganj, Madaripur, Shariatpur, Faridpur, Barishal and Jhalakathi will be the most vulnerable districts," he said.