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Conspiracies afoot to dislodge govt

Says Hasina at ALCWC meeting

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday alleged that a conspiracy is being hatched at home and abroad to dislodge her government and hand over power to an unelected government, said sources in the AL Central Working Committee.

She vowed to resist this and plots against the upcoming general election.

On Wednesday, she said she would never lease out St Martin's Island to stay in power. Yesterday, she spoke of mounting pressure on her about the island and that she would never give in as she does not assume power by giving an undertaking.

Hasina said this at the meeting of the ALCWC, the highest decision-making body of the party, at the Gono Bhaban.

During the six-hour meeting, which began at 10:30am, eight AL organising secretaries presented their reports on eight divisions. The AL chief enquired about problems at the grassroots level.

She repeatedly asked her colleagues to strengthen and unite the party since there is not much time left before the elections and added that frantic election preparations would start in October, said meeting insiders.

The next national election has to be held within 90 days prior to the end of the current parliament's tenure, which is January 29, 2024.

Hasina asked AL MPs to go to their constituencies, bridge the gap with the grassroots, and quell internal feuds.

She asked leaders and AL nomination seekers to make door-to-door visits to constituents and publicise the government's achievements. "Remember you have two weapons -- one is the government's achievements and the other is the misrule of the BNP-led four-party government," she was quoted as saying by a central leader.

The PM said if the incumbent MPs believe they would get party tickets and win staying in Dhaka, they would be wrong. She reiterated that the election would be participatory and tough, said meeting insiders.

She said questions were being raised about the electoral system, but her government would give a befitting response by holding free and fair polls.

Hasina asked leaders to form fully-fledged committees at units in which councils have been held and not to hold any councils before the election.

She cautioned them about putting infiltrators and "hybrids" in the party posts, said sources.

After ALCWC member Mushfique Hussain Chowdhury alleged that senior and dedicated leaders were being dropped from grassroots committees, the AL president said new blood will be injected into the party but not by sidelining experienced and senior leaders.

During the AL organising secretary's presentation on Khulna division, allegations were raised that the son of Motiar Rahman, newly elected president of Jhenidah's Shaikupa upazila unit AL, vandalised idols at a temple and grabbed the temple's land.

The AL chief said those linked to the repression of minorities and grabbing of their properties have no room in AL. She asked for Motiar to be removed, said sources.

She urged party leaders to refrain from mudslinging. Many nomination seekers are raising allegations against party MPs, Hasina said, adding that speaking against party MPs was tantamount to speaking against the party.

She said she has all sorts of reports on MPs and that the party would nominate people considering their popularity.

Hasina said a fresh survey on the leaders' popularity was being carried out.

AL president member Shajahan Khan and AL Joint General Secretary Bahauddin Nasim had an altercation in the meeting after Nasim accused Shajahan of patronising criminals, sources said.

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Workers of Bangladesh Water Development Board dump concrete blocks and sandbags on a road along the Dudhkumar river in Pateshwari area of Kurigram's Nageshwari upazila yesterday. The river has been swelling due to rain and onrush of water from upstream and threatening to flood farmland and villages on the right.

PHOTO: S DILIP ROY

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BANGLADESHI NATIONALS, BANKS

Their deposits with Swiss banks drop by 93.7pc

REJAU KARIM BYRON

Funds deposited by Bangladeshi citizens and banks with Swiss banks dropped 93.7 percent to 55.3 million Swiss francs (CHF) last year on the back of the pressure on the country's foreign currency reserves.

In 2021, Bangladeshi banks and citizens together had CHF 871.1 million with the Swiss banking system.

Of the CHF 55.3 million, CHF 35.6 million -- which comes to about Tk 429.5 crore -- belongs to Bangladeshi nationals, which is the highest since 2016, according to data released by the Swiss National Bank yesterday. The amount is an increase of 35.3 percent year-on-year.

The data does not specify who the amounts belong to and whether the funds were laundered from Bangladesh. A portion of the deposits may be legitimately earned income outside of Bangladesh.

At the end of 2022, Bangladeshi banks had just CHF 19.6 million, down from CHF 844.8 million, as the dollar shortage at home prompted them to use up their balance with Swiss banks to settle foreign transactions.

In 2022, Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves shrunk by about 26 percent to \$33.7 billion, according to central bank statistics. This prompted the authorities to ration the supply of dollars.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, dismissed the increase in Bangladeshi customer deposits with Swiss banks to the highest level since 2016, when it stood at CHF 47.6 million.

"It is a small amount -- Swiss banks have lost their allure to Bangladeshis," he said, adding that the amount is not even a patch on the volume of wealth that is flying out of Bangladesh.

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74TH FOUNDING ANNIV OF AL

Is AL drifting away from core ideals?

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

The Awami League-led government may have many successes on infrastructural and economic fronts over the past 14 years but along the way, the ruling party has seen a gradual erosion in its political ideals and core values.

The party, which has been in power since 2009, is celebrating its 74th founding anniversary today as one of the oldest and popular political parties in the country.

But the AL, as we see it now, is merely a shadow of its past. On the one hand, it has strayed from its fundamental principles of pluralistic and participatory politics and on the other, it has weakened over the years due to a gradual slide in activities and practices that once kept its organisational foundation alive and kicking.

The Sheikh Hasina-led AL government has carried out massive development projects at a level which is unparalleled in the history of independent Bangladesh. But sadly enough, it is also during

the tenures of the AL-led government that many of the people's fundamental democratic rights have remained unrealised, including the right to vote.

The AL led almost all democratic movements of the country. But when in power, especially since its second tenure, it developed a system of electing representatives unopposed, both in parliamentary and local government elections, which is an ominous sign for democracy.

The systemic weakening of democratic institutions and the enactment of controversial laws such as the Digital Security Act that restrain freedom of expression do not reflect on the party's core principle of democracy.

Besides, the three consecutive terms of the AL-led government are also marked by a lack of accountability and good governance, which led to corruption and cronyism.

There is no denying that the party now has an overwhelming support base across

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Intel agencies picking up 'active' BNP leaders

Exerting pressure on them
to join polls, alleges Fakhrul

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that intelligence agencies are picking up its "active" leaders and putting pressure on them to run in the next national polls under the present government defying their party's decision.

"I want to share this information with you [journalists] that intelligence agencies are picking up our politically active leaders who earlier contested or will contest the election. The leaders are being told to take part in the election even if the BNP boycotts it," said BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir.

Addressing a press briefing at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office, he said many BNP leaders are informing party high-ups that they are being threatened by the agencies.

"It seems we are now living in the medieval age as the present government is committing all kinds of wrongdoings to cling to power."

The BNP leader asked the agencies to refrain from such activities, including obstruction of people's peaceful movements, unlawful arrest, and harassment of opposition leaders and activists.

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PHOTO: AFP

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with US President Joe Biden, greets Vice President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff, during a welcoming ceremony for Modi, in the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, DC, US yesterday.

INDIA, US TIES

Biden, Modi hail new era

Set to sign flurry of defence,
military deals; Indian PM says
peace in Indo-Pacific a priority

REUTERS, Washington

President Joe Biden hailed a new era in the US-India relationship, after rolling out the White House red carpet for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi yesterday, touting deals on defense and commerce aimed at countering China's global influence.

The partnership is "stronger, closer and more dynamic than at any time in history," Biden told reporters at a joint press conference with Modi, and the economic relationship is "booming," with trade more than doubling over the past decade.

Modi touted "a new chapter" to the countries' "strategic partnership" after the two leaders emerged from Oval Office talks where the countries' differences on Russia and human rights were on the table.

Washington wants India to be a strategic counterweight to China and sees it as a critical partnership, although some analysts and former officials question India's willingness to stand up collectively to Beijing over issues such as Taiwan. Washington has also been frustrated by India's close ties with Russia amid Moscow's war in Ukraine.

Modi is seeking to raise the influence that India, the world's most populous country at 1.4 billion, has on the world stage in the wake of strained ties with neighboring China.

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