

Jamaat’s statement on patriotism ‘ridiculous’

Says Rizvi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi yesterday made an oblique reference to a recent statement by Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami on patriotism and termed it “ridiculous.”

On December 23, speaking at an event in Rangpur, Jamaat Ameer Dr Shafiqur Rahman said there were only two tested patriotic forces in the country -- one is the army, the other is Jamaat-e-Islami.

Rizvi said the army is undoubtedly patriotic because of its vital role in the 1971 Liberation War and in the 2024 July uprising.

He then raised questions about the

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Police on crowd control near the Chattogram court during the hearing of the bail petition of Chinmoy Krishna Das Brahmachari, spokesperson of Bangladesh Sammalito Sanatani Jagaran Jote, who was arrested in a sedition case last year. The photo was taken yesterday. Story on Page 12.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

27 migrants die off Tunisia in shipwrecks

AFP, Tunis

Twenty-seven migrants, including women and children, died after two boats capsized off central Tunisia, with 83 people rescued, a civil defence official told AFP yesterday.

The rescued and dead passengers, who were found off the Kerkennah Islands off central Tunisia, were aiming to reach Europe and were all from sub-Saharan African countries, said Zied Sdiri, head of civil defence in the city of Sfax.

Searches were still underway for other possible missing passengers, according to the Tunisian National Guard, which oversees the coastguard.

Govt officially

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Although the gazette was published on December 24, it was officially received on Thursday, Latiful Islam Shibli, executive director of Kabi Nazrul Institute, told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Until the gazette was printed by BG [Bangladesh Government] Press, it remained only a cabinet decision. Now it has received formal recognition. Since taking charge of the Nazrul Institute, I have worked on this matter with utmost importance. So finally, it is completed today [yesterday].”

Kazi Nazrul Islam, widely revered as the “Rebel Poet”, was brought to Dhaka from Kolkata with his family on May 24, 1972. The government allocated him a house at 330 B, Road 28 (Old), Dhanmondi, to honour his contributions, said the UNB report.

He was granted Bangladesh citizenship on February 18, 1976, and was also awarded the prestigious Ekushey Padak that same year.

The Kazi Nazrul Islam Institute Act of 2018 officially addressed him as the national poet. However, no official gazette was issued until recently.

The UNB report adds: Nazrul has been recognised as a central cultural figure since December 10, 1929, when he was honoured as the national poet and national helmsman at the Albert Hall in Kolkata.

The event was attended by luminaries such as Subhas Chandra Bose, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, S Wazed Ali, and Dinesh Chandra Das, representing the collective admiration of the Bengali community towards him.

Since Bangladesh’s independence, successive presidents, prime ministers, and chief advisers have referred to Nazrul as the national poet in official statements marking his birth and death anniversaries. Despite widespread acceptance of his status, a formal declaration had long been absent.

In June 2022, Supreme Court lawyer Asad Uddin and nine others filed a petition seeking the publication of a gazette that officially recognises Nazrul as the national poet.

In response, the High Court issued a rule asking why Nazrul should not be recognised as the national poet, and directed the cultural affairs secretary, director-general of Bangla Academy, and executive director of Nazrul Institute to respond within four weeks.

This gazette notification marks a historic moment, solidifying Kazi Nazrul Islam’s role as a beacon of cultural identity and resistance for the nation.

Mercury may continue to dip over next few days

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degrees Celsius are considered a mild cold wave, 6.1-8 degrees a moderate cold wave, and 4.1-6 degrees a severe one.

Met officials said the shrinking gap between day and night temperatures will intensify the cold weather.

Yesterday, the lowest temperature in Dhaka was recorded at 13.08 degrees Celsius, and the highest at 16 degrees.

Dr Md Abul Kalam Mallik, meteorologist at the Dhaka Met office, said, “The difference is only 2.2 degrees, which is resulting in the chilling cold sweeping over the city.”

About why the difference between day and night temperatures has come down, he said the ridge of the sub-continental high currently extends up to Bangladesh.

“Another reason is the chilling winds coming from the northern direction and the Himalayas.”

He also said the dense fog enveloping the city and the eastern and western regions is restricting sunlight, which is further worsening the cold.

“This situation will continue for a

few more days.”

The Met forecast further said air navigation, and inland river and road communications may be temporarily disrupted due to the dense fog, with sunlight lasting for 5-7 hours a day this month.

Additionally, one or two low pressure systems are likely to form over the Bay this month, and one of these may intensify into a depression.

Yesterday, the lowest temperature -- 9.8 degrees Celsius -- was recorded in Chuadanga, with 95 percent air humidity, said Zahidul Islam, an observer of the Chuadanga Met office, adding that temperatures are likely to drop further as a mild cold wave continues to affect the region.

Kamal Hossain, a local, said, “People are avoiding venturing out. The low-income people, however, are suffering immensely as they have to work in this cold weather. Many of them are trying to keep warm by making fires.”

The situation is similar in the northern districts.

In Dinajpur, the morning temperature yesterday was 10.2 degrees Celsius.

Tofazzal Hossain, in charge at the Dinajpur Weather Office, said the cold is expected to persist some more days. He urged locals to take necessary precautions.

The day temperature in Lalmonirhat was recorded at 11.4 degrees Celsius, and in Kurigram it was 11.3, according to the Rangpur Met Office.

Abdullah Al Mamun, deputy director of Kurigram’s agriculture extension department, said the farmers, particularly those living near the Brahmaputra, Teesta, Dharla, Dudhkumar and Gangadhar river belts, are forced to work in this harsh cold to prevent crop loss.

Tentulia’s Weather Observatory Centre recorded the district’s day temperature at 11.3 degrees.

According to doctors at Rangpur Medical College Hospital, there has been an increase in patients with cold-related illnesses, including pneumonia, respiratory infections, and diarrhoea.

(Our correspondents from Benapole, Dinajpur, Lalmonirhat, and Thakurgaon contributed to this report.)

EC to verify voter list

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“But they can assess the accuracy of the list by engaging an independent organisation or university,” he said.

Sakhawat said when he was an election commissioner, an international firm audited the voter list and found it to be 99 percent accurate.

In 2008, when Sakhawat was an EC member, a voter list was prepared with photos.

EC Sanaullah yesterday said the commission would not feel confident without “an accurate” list.

Some of the problems in the current list are: names of dead people have not been erased, some foreigners are on the list, and some people are named more than once, he said.

Nineteen Rohingya were to Nilphamari from Chattogram and became voters there, he said. “The evidence is right in front of us. These issues have made our voter list controversial.”

Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus had said he hoped the next election would be held late this year or in the first half of next year, Sanaullah said, adding that

updating the voter list was part of the preparation.

Asked whether the new voters included in the list through door-to-door campaigns would be able to cast their vote if the election took place in December 2025, Sanaullah said there was no legal barrier to that.

“We have in principle decided that if a significant number of people become eligible voters, they can be included on the list through an ordinance. The decision is not final. We will look into the possibilities,” he said.

Asked about the chief adviser’s proposal to lower the voting age to 17, Sanaullah said that it was a personal opinion. “A discussion is going on about it. We will decide when there is political consensus and subsequently change the constitution,” he said.

Sanaullah said that the total number of voters in the country has risen to 12,36,83,512, with 6,33,30,103 male, 6,03,52,415 female, and 994 hijra voters according to the latest draft voter list.

Since March 2 of last year, 18,33,352 people became new voters.

Disclose AL govt’s power

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The AL spent about Tk 3.33 lakh crore in the power sector in the 16 years and looted more than Tk 1 lakh crore from the amount in the name of capacity charges, which the government has to pay whether the plant produces electricity or not, according to the BNP.

“By whom, and how were the capacity charges fixed in the deals? We want to know how the capacity of a machine [power plants] was calculated and what is the efficiency of the machine. Most of the machines that are receiving capacity charges by sitting idle are defective. They looted public money by installing defective machines and left,” Tuku said.

The previous BNP government had the plan to generate at least 60 percent of power by the public sector, he said.

The AL government moved away from the plan by depending on the private sector to generate nearly 80 percent of the power.

“They kept idle the government-owned power plants and installed private sector plants which took high-capacity charges for years.”

The quick rental power plants are usually installed to address emergency

power shortages.

These plants were supposed to operate for two years but have been running for 15 years or more, and they have cashed their 75 percent investment without producing any power, Tuku said.

He named the five highest recipients of capacity charges: Summit Group (Tk 10,630 crore), Aggreko International (Tk 7,932 crore), Ultra Power Holdings (Tk 7,523 crore), United Group (Tk 6,575 crore) and RPCL (Tk 5,117 crore).

Besides, Bangladesh paid Tk 1,115 crore to India as capacity charges in the name of power import.

“The Awami League government’s developments in this sector are not sustainable. The economy can collapse in the future due to their misconduct.”

Tuku also raised questions about the corruption in the purchase of pre-paid meters, alleged involvement of Hasina’s family in the Rooppur nuclear power plant and allegations of corruption by former state minister Nasrul Hamid in the purchase of liquefied natural gas.

“Most of the companies that supplied LNG were owned by Nasrul Hamid and they looted millions.”

VAT hike won’t fuel inflation

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three-star restaurants, where an additional Tk 10 is unlikely to make a significant financial impact on consumers. Such price adjustments shouldn’t be a headache for anyone -- this argument simply doesn’t hold ground.”

There are no plans to impose VAT on lower-tier eateries such as roadside diners where many low-income individuals dine, he said, adding that restaurants with an annual turnover exceeding Tk 50 lakh will fall under the provision.

About the impact on airfare, he said: “I don’t think paying an additional Tk 200 is burdensome for those who can afford to fly. It’s a negligible amount.”

In case of air travel, the excise duty is expected to be increased from 25 percent to 100 percent.

“There are few countries in the world, including Nepal and Bhutan, where taxes are as low as they are

in Bangladesh. In fact, we have almost eliminated taxes on essential commodities.”

Explaining the rationale behind the VAT hike, the adviser said: “The government has already provided tax rebates worth thousands of crores of taka. Despite this, tax collection remains below target.”

“Our fiscal deficit is alarmingly high, and we can no longer rely solely on borrowing and deficit budgets to sustain the economy. If we want to invest in preferred sectors like education and healthcare, we must increase revenue. Dependence on domestic and foreign borrowing alone is unsustainable.”

The NBR’s move is also an attempt at trimming the list of items that have a low VAT rate, in tune with recommendations of the International Monetary Fund.

The revised rates will come into effect after the official notification is issued.