

Jamaat's statement on patriotism 'ridiculous'

Says Rizvi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Syhet

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 Sammilito Sanatani Jagaran Jote, who was arrested in a sedition case last year. The photo was taken yesterday. Story on Page 12.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

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 Sdri, 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 Bangladeshi 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 Gangadar 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 Rohingyas went 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 government spent about Tk 3.33 lakh crore on 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 6,755 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."

It's unlikely to be recommended

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distribution of seats corresponds with the proportion of the total votes cast for each party. For example, if a party gets 40 percent of the total votes, the PR system will allow it to get 40 percent of the seats in parliament.

Contacted, Electoral Reform Commission Chairman Badiul Alam Majumdar avoided a direct answer on the issue.

"Proportional representation is a matter related to the Constitution Reform Commission," he said.

Badiul also said the Electoral Reform Commission was trying its best to submit the report today.

Prof Ali Riaz, head of the Constitution Reform Commission, said that they have received proposals both in favour of and against the proportional representation system.

"We are carefully considering arguments of both sides," he told The Daily Star.

"In addition, we have studied the positive and negative aspects of the system. Since we have not yet finalised our recommendations, I cannot

disclose any specific proposals at this time, particularly those related to the proportional representation system," he added.

Currently, Bangladesh practises the first-past-the-post system, in which the candidate receiving the highest number of votes in a constituency wins a seat in parliament.

The interim government constituted the Electoral Reform Commission, and five others on October 3 and sought their reports within 90 days. Yesterday, the government gave the Electoral Reform Commission 15 more days to submit its report, said Abdul Alim, a member of the commission.

Since its formation, the commission has taken proposals from stakeholders, including political parties, former chief election commissioners, members of different citizen platforms, and the ordinary people.

Party sources said Jamaat-e-Islami, Communist Party of Bangladesh, Gono Odhikar Parishad, and Islami Andolan Bangladesh suggested the proportional representation electoral

system in their proposals to the reform commission.

However, the BNP was against the system. A standing committee member of the party yesterday told The Daily Star they did not include the system in their proposals.

The BNP leader, who wished to be anonymous, warned that proportional representation system can give an advantage to the Awami League, which was ousted in the 2024 mass uprising.

He said the system can also increase the chance of potential candidates offering bribes to secure nomination, since their fate will depend on party tickets, not on votes.

"We don't favour the proportional representation system," Abdul Moyeen Khan, a standing committee member of the BNP, told this newspaper.

"We believe in the 'one voter, one vote' method, which has continued in the Westminster system for several centuries. People don't just vote for the party, but also for the candidates," he said.

Ctg court denies bail

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"We also told the court that permission from the home ministry was not taken before filing the FIR [first information report] with police."

However, Public Prosecutor Mofizul said, "Sedition is a non-bailable offence and it carries a punishment of life imprisonment. We told the court that the case is being investigated and no report has been submitted yet."

"We opposed the bail petition, presenting our points, and the court denied bail to Chinmoy after hearing our arguments."

The hearing, which began around 11:00am, was held in a packed courtroom amid tight security.

A large number of police, BGB, APBN, DB, and army personnel stood guard in the court building and its adjacent area.

Colleagues of slain lawyer Saiful Islam Alif gathered outside the courtroom to know the update. Police personnel were seen

controlling the exit and entry points to the court building. Two additional commissioners of Chattogram Metropolitan Police supervised the security arrangements.

When the court rejected the bail plea, the lawyers who were outside the courtroom brought out a procession, welcoming the decision.

Around 11:40am, a team of 11 Supreme Court lawyers, led by Apurba, who represented Chinmoy during yesterday's hearing, left the court premises in two microbuses with a police escort.

As they were leaving, a section of lawyers chanted slogans such as "Dala" and demanded justice for Saiful.

On October 31 last year, Firoz Khan, former general secretary of Chattogram's Mohora ward BNP, filed the case with Kotwali Police Station, accusing Chinmoy and 18 others of disrespecting the national flag during a rally of the Hindu

community on October 25 in the port city's New Market area.

On November 26 that year, a Chattogram court sent Chinmoy to jail, rejecting his bail prayer after he was arrested in the capital the previous day.

Following the rejection, supporters of Chinmoy burst into protests and blocked the prison van on its way to jail. They demanded his immediate release.

Later, police charged truncheons to disperse the agitated followers of Chinmoy, triggering a clash among law enforcers, lawyers, and the supporters in the court building area. Lawyer Saiful was beaten and hacked to death amid the clash.

On December 3, Chattogram Metropolitan Session Judge Saiful Islam fixed yesterday for the bail hearing for Chinmoy.

Later, an anticipatory bail petition of the ex-ISKCON leader