

Keep Ctg port under national control

Protesters urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Leaders of labour, student, and professional groups in Chattogram yesterday warned against any move to lease out terminals of Chattogram Port, including the New Mooring Container Terminal (NCT), to foreign companies.

Speaking at a protest rally, they threatened intensified action if the government proceeds with the plan.

The demonstration, held at Agrabad Badamtoli intersection under the banner "Bondor Rokkhay Chattogramer Sramik-Chhatra-Peshajibi-Nagorikbrindo", drew sharp criticism of the administration.

Speakers alleged that despite the port's profitability and operational capacity, a conspiracy is underway to transfer control to multinational corporations and foreign powers, undermining national interests.

They also claimed that the government has imposed a one-

month ban on rallies and public gatherings in the port area to suppress opposition and facilitate the signing of "anti-national" agreements.

Freedom fighter and Gonomukti Union President Raja Miah presided over the rally, which was addressed by Trade



Union Centre President Khorshed Alam, SKOP Joint Coordinator Rizwanur Rahman, Shafi Uddin Kabir Abid of the Socialist Party of Bangladesh (Marxist), Chattogram Bondor Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal General Secretary Ibrahim Khokan, and Dock Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal General Secretary Akhtar Hossain Selim.



Imran Howlader arranges aluminium motorboat propellers on display in his shop for sale to fishermen. Available in various sizes, the propellers are priced between Tk 150 and Tk 400. The photo was taken in Barishal Sadar upazila yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

Fishers set sail

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district has around 65,000 hilsa fishermen. "The ban has been fully successful. Fishermen will resume fishing tonight," he added.

A similar scene was witnessed in Cox's Bazar.

Syed Ahmed, a fisherman from Maheshkhali upazila, said, "The last 22 days were very difficult. I had to borrow money to run my family and repair my boat. Since I don't know any other work, I have to remain in this profession."

Cox's Bazar has around 5,000 fishing trawlers, most of which have already been prepared to resume operations.

Nazir Ahmed, president of Shahapur Island Fishing Trawler Owners' Association in Teknaf, said, "Around 100 trawlers from our dock will set sail tonight."

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, in a special weather bulletin, said a low-pressure area over the southeast Bay of Bengal has intensified into a depression.

[Our Patuakhali and Cox's Bazar correspondents contributed to this report.]

Parties eager

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of social fascism still persist, warning that without fostering dialogue and connections among the streams of Islam in the country, the state would continue to face uncertainty.

He added that though 90-92 percent of Bangladesh's population is Muslim, the community is divided into different tariqas (orders).

Political leaders, Mahfuj said, have done little to promote unity among them. "Instead, some have aligned with Qawmi groups and others with Sunni groups, using religious institutions as instruments of politics."

He further said several people had been arrested in connection with the attacks on multiple mazars (mausoleum or shrine), and that surveys would soon be carried out to facilitate their renovation.

Urging the management committees of attacked mazars to file cases, the adviser warned that if the current culture continues, one group's version of Islam could target another's places of worship.

"Today it is the Sufis;

tomorrow it could be the Qawmi community."

Mahfuj acknowledged a sense of frustration over the lack of progress over the past year, warning that retaliatory actions driven by such resentment would yield no positive outcome.

"Over the past 15 years, an alliance of convenience developed between Sufi circles and the Awami League, despite their earlier ideological differences."

The understanding, he said, was that the AL would offer protection while the Sufis would support the party at the polls. "This dynamic has kept religious politics stagnant."

Mahfuj also observed that the Qawmi groups were no exception, as different political parties have also used them for their own benefit.

He said there have been claims of people being removed from mosques.

"This is not unique to the interim government. It has been happening for the past 50 years," he added, pointing out that mosque committees, as well as the Islami Foundation's governing body, tend to change whenever a new government comes to power.

North Korea is 'sort of a nuclear power': Trump

AFP, Aboard Air Force One

US President Donald Trump said Friday that North Korea was "sort of a nuclear power" as he left the United States for Asia on a trip that could include a meeting with Pyongyang's leader Kim Jong Un.

Asked aboard Air Force One whether he was open to North Korea's demand to be recognised as a nuclear state as a precondition for dialogue with Washington, Trump replied: "Well, I think they are sort of a nuclear power."

"When you say they have to be recognized as a nuclear power, well, they got a lot of nuclear weapons, I'll say that."

Trump is expected in South Korea on Wednesday for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Forum.

US media have previously reported officials from his administration have privately discussed setting up a meeting between Trump and North Korean leader Kim, who he last held talks with in 2019.

Trump has said he hopes to meet Kim again -- possibly this year.

Kim said last month he had "fond memories" of Trump and was open to talks if the United States dropped its "delusional" demand that Pyongyang give up its nuclear weapons.

On Friday, South Korea's unification minister Chung Dong young said he believed there was a "considerable" chance that Trump will meet Kim during his visit to the peninsula next week.

But a senior US official, speaking on condition of anonymity, told reporters in a call Friday that a meeting "is not on the schedule for this trip."

While no official announcements of the duo's meeting have been made, South Korea and the United Nations Command halted tours of the Joint Security Area (JSA) from late October to early November.

Kim and Trump last met in 2019 at Panmunjom in the JSA in the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) separating the

two Koreas -- the only place where soldiers from both sides face each other on a regular basis.

Minister Chung said North Koreans have been spotted "sprucing up" areas near the JSA for the first time this year -- cleaning, pulling weeds, tidying flower beds and taking photos.

Kim met Trump three times for high-profile summits during the US leader's first term.

The duo's last and impromptu meeting at Panmunjom was hastily arranged after Trump extended an invitation to Kim on Twitter a day prior.

That event saw the two leaders shake hands over the concrete slabs dividing North and South before Trump walked a few paces into Pyongyang's territory -- becoming the first US president ever to set foot on North Korean soil.

But talks eventually collapsed over just how much of its nuclear arsenal the North was willing to give up and what Pyongyang would get in return.

RMG belt caught

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League operatives, it is now largely controlled by local BNP leaders. The industry produces around four lakh tonnes of jhut annually.

A factory manager in Tongi said his factory generates jhut worth Tk 50 lakh a month, but is forced to sell at half the price. In Narayanganj, a trader said medium-sized factories produce jhut worth Tk 20-22 lakh monthly, yet political leaders pay only Tk 2-4 per kg, far below the market rate of Tk 40.

Control over jhut ensures a steady monthly income, fuelling violent turf wars. Media reports say 30 people were injured in 15 clashes over jhut trade in Gazipur, Narayanganj and Savar between August 5 last year and October 8 this year.

According to Ain o Salish Kendra, at least 65 BNP leaders and activists were killed and 2,962 injured in internal clashes nationwide in the 12 months till August 5 this year -- many linked to jhut disputes.

FACES CHANGE, EXTORTION CONTINUES

Factory owners say extortion has become more localised. "Previously, it was centrally controlled; now it's area-based," said Nazmul Kabir, managing director of AR Jeans Producer Ltd in Savar. "We manage and move forward, hoping law and order improves."

In Savar, financial transactions have shifted from central AL leaders to local BNP operatives. In Gazipur, BNP factions reportedly use crude bombs, firearms and arson, while in Narayanganj, intimidation is more discreet.

Taskeen Ahmed, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, said political figures pressure businesses for "contributions".

"Even scrap materials must be sold at half the market price. Refusal means shutdown. One group left, only to be replaced by another," said Taskeen, who owns a factory in Savar.

Echoing him, businesspeople said extortion persists despite changes in political faces.

Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed admitted extortion has increased since August 5 last year. "We are not a political government, so we cannot take harsh actions. Extortion rates have gone up from Tk 1 to Tk 1.5 or Tk 2," he told journalists on September 30.

BGMEA President Mahmud Hasan Khan said such problems intensify after regime changes. "Compared to a year ago, the situation has improved. Though incidents still occur, they are less frequent."

A survey by Innovation Consulting found 56.6 percent of respondents -- mostly urban youth and high-income groups -- believed extortion had risen in the six months till September 21.

BNP insiders said many grassroots leaders, previously in hiding during AL's 15-year rule, saw an opportunity to profit from jhut trade after the regime change.

Abu Al Yusuf, member secretary of Narayanganj BNP, alleged that Chhatra

Kamaruzzaman, SQ Chowdhury

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well as BNP leader Salahuddin Quader Chowdhury, were sentenced to death in "false" cases over crimes against humanity committed in 1971.

Recalling the post-Liberation War period, he said the media, particularly the press, faced severe repression.

About 60 lakh political leaders and activists faced false cases, about 20,000 were killed and 1,700 others were victims of enforced disappearance during the "fascist rule" of the Awami League, he said.

"After the establishment of Baksal in 1975, all newspapers were shut down. I remember that many journalists became unemployed and some even worked as hawkers in front of Baitul Mukarram as there were no newspapers left."

After the political changeover in 1975, BNP founder President Ziaur Rahman was the first to move away from the one-

party system and introduce multi-party democracy, ensuring press freedom.

"We must not forget that the key reforms began during his [Zia's] time and were later carried forward by former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia," Fakhrul added.

At the same event, BNP Standing Committee member Salahuddin Ahmed yesterday warned that the nation will not forgive political parties if fascism returns to Bangladesh because of their divisions.

"If our disunity and divisions ever open the door for the return of fascism, the nation will never forgive us. We must, therefore, stay united."

All parties must stand together and close every door to the return of the fascist Awami League, he said.

"I hope in the coming days we will all remain united despite our differences of opinion

and ideology when it comes to the country, its democracy, independence and sovereignty."

It is a sacred duty for all to build a strong democratic state and society for future generations.

Recalling his personal struggles, Salahuddin said:

"For writing a few columns, I had to live in exile for nearly nine and a half years, endure torture at Aynagar and spend time in prison."

Sharing a memory, he said: "Once, Amar Desh Editor Mahimudur Rahman and I were kept in separate prison cells at PG Hospital. He was on a hunger strike then. I tried to convince him to break his fast, telling him that if he died, Sheikh Hasina would be happy. Later, senior leaders intervened and he broke the strike after six or seven days."

Salahuddin went on to urge the media to play a constructive role through their writing in building a democratic state.

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Academic and historian Professor Perveen Hasan said Sher-e-Bangla's life shows that compromise is not weakness but a necessity in leadership. "No

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The Daily Star journalist Shamsuddoza Sajen delivered the welcome speech, while the session was moderated by journalist Emran Mahfuz.

Man held for brandishing 'dummy rifle' in procession

STAR REPORT

Police have arrested a man in Dhaka's Turag area for brandishing a "dummy rifle" during a procession.

The arrestee is Mujahidul Islam Chowdhury, 49, confirmed Taleb Rahman, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

According to police, a patrol team, based on a tip-off, learned that a group of people had gathered near Khalpar Police Box area in Turag and were brandishing weapons to create panic and disrupt public order around 1:30pm Friday.

As police approached the spot, the group fled. Later, the investigators identified Mujahidul through video footage captured by locals and subsequent questioning.

Around 4:30pm on the same day, a police team from Turag, with the help of Uttara West Police, conducted a raid at a house in Sector 12 of Uttara and arrested Mujahidul with the dummy rifle.

A case was filed against him under the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009, police added.