

‘Every human life matters, whether BNP understands that or not’: Momen briefs foreign diplomats

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Online Desk: Highlighting BNP-Jamaat’s “brutality and destruction” on October 28-29, the government on Monday conveyed to the international community its “strong and unwavering” stance to stick to the democratic process as mandated by the constitution, and hold “free, fair and credible” election in time.

“I would like to, however, emphasize that every human life matters – our BNP friends understand that or not! We will keep showing utmost patience and restraint,” Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen said while briefing the diplomats at state guesthouse Jamuna in Dhaka this afternoon.

PM’s Adviser Salman F Rahman, Law Minister Anisul Huq, State Minister for Foreign Affairs Md. Shahriar Alam and Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen, among others, were present at the briefing.

Representatives of UN agencies and international organizations were also present at the briefing on the current situation in Bangladesh.

Speaking at the briefing, the foreign minister said, law enforcement agencies should also do everything within the legal parameters to provide safety and security to citizens, to maintain public order, and to foil any attempt to destroy private and public properties, to destabilize the country, or to damage the democratic and constitutional processes.

Momen said, the motive behind terrorizing the nation and misleading the people is to impede democratic processes and promote unconstitutional forces. “BNP’s tactics of fear and forgery did not work out before and they will not now,” he said.

Responding to a question, the law minister said the next election will be held either at the end of 2023 or the first week of 2024, and it will be “free, fair, and peaceful.”

“It does not matter who comes or does not come. A participatory election means participation of people. If there is a participation of people, then that is participatory election,” he said.

The law minister said that the diplomats were given a chance to ask questions but they did not have any questions.

“We understand that the explanation we provided was clear. It is their responsibility to say whether they are convinced or not,” he said.

Shahriar Alam said, if anyone wants to take part in the election, they must follow the constitutional path.

He said that they gave a compilation of video footage and still photographs and also a written version of what happened on October 28 and 29 – killings, attacks on police and journalists, and on Chief Justice’s residence, among others.

Hours before the briefing, diplomatic missions in Dhaka called on all stakeholders to exercise “restraint, eschew violence and work together” to create the conditions for free, fair, participatory, and peaceful elections.

“The governments of Australia, Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States are deeply concerned by the political violence during political gatherings in Dhaka on 28 October,” said a joint statement signed by the embassies and high commissions of the countries.

“We are shocked at what unfolded on October 28 and yesterday. We are not, however, surprised as we have experienced BNP-Jamaat’s dreadful violence in the past,” Momen told the diplomats, adding that BNP and its allies have a long history of violence and aggression.

In the early 2000s, BNP-Jamaat created an atmosphere of violence and intimidation, particularly during the 2001 general election, which was marred by widespread violence and allegations of vote rigging.

After the election, BNP-Jamaat activists committed looting, rape and murders, particularly targeting the minority community.

In 2013, before the general election, BNP and its allies vandalized several thousand vehicles and set many of those on fire using petrol bombs, at times burning alive the passengers stuck inside. Some of them are still living with horrific scars and trauma.

More than 400 people, including 20 law enforcement officers, were killed in the petrol bomb and hand grenade attacks.

“We dispatched on the evening of October 28 summarizing the rampant violence conducted by the BNP activists. You have watched the footage on TV and online of how the on-duty police officer was beaten to death or how the precious life of a public transport worker was taken by torching a public bus,” Momen said.

The foreign minister said, “You may have also observed that this time their target is more on the police and judiciary. Apart from brutally beating one policeman to death, they attacked the residences of Chief Justice and other judges, torched six police outposts. Sixty-five police officers were admitted at the Police Hospital and another at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.”

They even set fire at the Police Hospital premises and ambulance, causing disruption of emergency medical services, he said.

Momen said BNP did not spare on-duty journalists and camera personnel. According to Bangladesh Federal Journalists Union (BFUJ), BNP activists attacked and critically injured at least 25 media professionals.

They were seen gathering sticks, iron rods etc. for the last few days and hiding them for use on the day of the demonstration, said the foreign minister.

BNP has called for a three-day nation-wide blockade starting from tomorrow. “We can only expect more and more assault on the lives and properties of innocent civilians,” Momen said.

However, apart from the law-and-order aspect, there is an economic aspect of the strikes and blockades too.

According to the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, strikes and blockades by BNP cost the country a total of Tk 1,600 crore (or USD 192.3 million) or 0.2 percent of the GDP per day.

“BNP often plays victim to misguide diplomatic missions and our foreign friends in order to gain sympathy,” Momen said.

“This time, all of a sudden, we saw a so-called ‘adviser to US President Joe Biden’ speaking to the press at the BNP party office flanked by senior BNP leaders. Later, it was revealed that he is an imposter and he admitted that the BNP leaders instigated him to misguide people,” the foreign minister said.