

Hasnat's Facebook post about army was inappropriate : Sarjis

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Online Desk : The process of how statements about the army were posted on Facebook by Hasnat Abdullah, the Chief Organiser (Southern Region) of the National Citizen Party (NCP), did not seem appropriate, commented Sarjis Alam, the Chief Organiser (Northern Region) of the party. He stated that this approach could create a trust crisis in future discussions with any stakeholders. Hasnat Abdullah made his Facebook post on March 21, ten days after the meeting with the army chief. In response, Sarjis Alam posted his statement on Facebook today, Sunday (March 23).

In his post, Sarjis Alam wrote : “Corrections, additions, and omissions regarding the meeting with the army chief on March 11: That day, Hasnat and I went and spoke with the army chief. Another key member of our party was also supposed to accompany us, but due to personal issues at the last moment, he could not attend. First and foremost, let me clarify that we were not summoned to the cantonment that day. Rather, we had occasional exchanges of questions and answers with the Chief of Army Staff’s military adviser via messages whenever needed.

On the day the army chief made a somewhat stern statement on the anniversary of the Pikhana massacre, saying ‘Enough is enough,’ I asked his military adviser whether they perceived anything undesirable. The army chief’s statement seemed relatively straightforward and harsh. The adviser asked if we wanted to discuss the matter directly, to which I responded that it could be discussed. Subsequently, we met with the army chief. In the meeting room at the army headquarters, it was just the three of us—Hasnat, the Chief of Army Staff, and me. As individuals, people observe or interpret any person or their opinion in different ways. Hasnat observed and received the Chief of Army Staff’s remarks in his own way and wrote about them on Facebook. However, I have some disagreements in this regard.

From my perspective, I do not view the statement made that day as a direct ‘proposal’ but rather as an ‘expression of opinion.’ There is a difference between ‘expressing an opinion’ and ‘making a proposal.’ However, compared to previous meetings, the army chief spoke in a much more straightforward manner. As for the claim that pressure was exerted to establish a ‘Refined Awami League,’ I did not feel that there was any coercion. Instead, the army chief confidently stated that if a Refined Awami League did not emerge, it could lead to long-term political instability in the country.

Hasnat’s statement covered topics such as ‘Refined Awami League, Saber Hossain, Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Sohel Taj’ and whether Awami League would return, what would happen if they participated in the election, what if they did not, when they might return, or whether they would return at all. These discussions involved the potential impact on national stability or instability. However, the way Hasnat presented his post on Facebook made the conversation seem more extreme than it actually was. The discussion was certainly more straightforward and self-confident than usual, but it was not as extreme as it appeared. The necessity of a Refined Awami League’s participation in the election was indeed expressed as an opinion.

Hasnat also mentioned another exchange: ‘At one point in the discussion, I asked—how can you forgive a party that has neither apologised nor admitted its crimes? The response from the other side came in an angry tone: “You people know nothing. You lack wisdom and experience. We have been in this service for at least forty years—longer than your age.”’ This conversation did happen, but it occurred while we were standing outside the meeting room, before we left in our car. The Chief of Army Staff made the statement in a tone that I did not perceive as angry but rather as a senior addressing juniors with the weight of experience. I do not endorse the narrative or slogan of ‘Hasnat vs. Waqar.’ Hasnat and army chief Waqar-Uz-Zaman hold

different positions. It is never relevant to place the Bangladesh Army in direct confrontation with the National Citizen Party, other political parties, or the people. Moreover, discussions about the army chief's resignation, which have surfaced in some places, do not reflect our position.

Additionally, I would like to express a personal opinion. I may be wrong, but at this moment, this is what I believe to be correct. During the tenure of an interim government, various political parties maintain some form of communication with the Bangladesh Army regarding the overall situation in the country. They uphold privacy in these interactions. Even if we disagreed with certain points raised in our discussion with the Chief of Army Staff, we could have deliberated within our party forum, made decisions accordingly, and implemented appropriate programs. Alternatively, we could have engaged in discussions with other political parties to reach a unified decision and taken to the streets against any version of the Awami League, just as we are doing now.

However, the way these matters were disclosed through a Facebook post does not seem appropriate to me. Rather, it could lead to a trust crisis in future important discussions with any stakeholders. My statement differs from Hasnat's on several points. Many may criticize me for this, but I firmly believe that we have never been individuals who simply go with the flow. If we were, we would not have stood against the gun barrels of the Hasina regime. Even today, if anyone points a gun at Hasnat, we are committed to standing in front of him. However, when a comrade's statement requires correction from my perspective, I will do so. This sense of responsibility is why, on June 6, when a few people first stood against the quota system at the Shaheed Minar, we were at the forefront. I believe this very sense of responsibility will keep us on the right path. The willingness to self-criticize will take us to our desired destination. Our struggle against the return of 'any version of the Awami League'—which was responsible for the July massacre, the BDR massacre, and the Shapla Chattar massacre—will continue.