

Awami League to bid goodbye to secularism

## Women's rights leaders appalled

Monday 25 December 2006, by [New Age \(Bangladesh\)](#) (Date first published: 25 December 2006).

### Staff Correspondent

Women leaders and right activists have blasted and condemned the reported agreement signed by Awami League with Khelafat Majlish on legalising fatwa if voted to power.

They said such a move is a suicidal one and a big assault on the ongoing movement against religious fundamentalism; and also a blow to the fight for a democratic and liberal humanitarian society.

They said such a decision was not expected from Awami League, which preaches spirits of liberation war, democracy and secularism.

'As an election strategy, the decision is a suicidal one,' said Ayesha Khanon, general secretary of Bangladesh Mohila Parishad. 'I am seriously concerned and disappointed by such an agreement.'

She said the decision came when they are fighting against fundamentalism to establish of a secular state having no disparity between men and women.

Terming the move a very unfortunate one for the countrymen, she said it will leave a dreadful impact on the society, while rural women, especially those who are poor, are subject to frequent torture and harassment through issuance of fatwa, a religious decree, by Islamic clerics.

Since Awami League itself was very vocal against fundamentalism, Ayesha said they would soon take the matter to party chief Sheikh Hasina and ask her to scrap the settlement with the Islamist group.

Former adviser to the caretaker government and executive director of Ain O Salish Kendra,

Sultana Kamal strongly condemned the accord and vowed to resist it at any cost. 'It's not acceptable.'

'Those who claim themselves the carriers of the liberation war spirit and secular belief now seem bowing to fundamentalists by signing the agreement,' she said, wondering, 'What will happen to the country's women if fatwa is legalised?'

She apprehended that the country would turn into a fundamental state if such agreement was implemented.

She believed that the move was aimed to grab political benefits by the party. 'We are stunned by the news,' said Shirin Akhter, joint general secretary of Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal, adding AL did not discuss the issue with others in the 14-party alliance. 'It is contrary to our (alliance's) ongoing movement for a secular and progressive country.'

Also president of Karmajibi Nari that campaigns for protecting women workers' rights, Shirin said the move was very alarming for the movement for establishing and protecting rights of women in the society. 'Such an agreement can't be implemented in the country, no matter which government or party goes to power,' she replied when asked about her stand against the move. 'We will soon discuss the issue in a meeting of our (14-party) alliance.'

Seriously condemning the agreement, Hazera Khatun, a central leader of Workers Party of Bangladesh, said AL took a terrible step by doing that. 'All the bad things are accommodated in the five-point pact, which is enough to take the whole women society to the dark.'

She said there is no place for fatwa in a democratic and modern society. 'Fatwa is the main weapon of harassing women and snatching their rights,' she lamented.

'AL has formed a mega alliance and it can do it, but it can never sign such a reactionary agreement with an Islamist party.'

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\* From New Age, 25 December 2006. Circulated by South Asia Citizens Wire | December 24-25, 2006 | Dispatch No. 2338 - Year 8.