

Afghans enjoy freedom despite growing fear

REUTERS, Kabul

Five years after US forces launched their offensive to oust Afghanistan's Taliban, Shakeela Jan says she is happy to have the freedom to work but that she travels to her job everyday in fear.

US-led forces routed the Taliban in weeks following the October 7, 2001 launch of Operation Enduring Freedom. But five years later, the hard-line Islamists and their militant allies have mounted their most sustained campaign of violence.

Women were banned from working under the Taliban. Now, Jan works with a dozen other women in a Ministry of Communications call centre.

"We're worried when we come to work. You can see how the situation is getting worse every day," said Jan.

There have been 56 suicide attacks in Afghanistan so far this year compared with 17 the whole of last year. Dozens of people have been killed in blasts in Kabul over the past month.

"People have to have security where they live but there's no security. How can we work and enjoy working outside our homes?" Jan asked.

About 40,000 foreign troops, half of them American, are in Afghanistan -- the most since 2001. Fighting is largely confined to the countryside in the south and east. But bombers have struck across the country.

The anniversary of the start of the US-led offensive is not being marked in Afghanistan. Most people are not aware of it.

"The purpose of the American invasion of Afghanistan was to destroy al Qaeda, but they couldn't," said former policeman Abdul Mohib, when asked about the anniversary.

"Now we see al Qaeda is stronger than five years ago and people are suffering a lot because of their underground operations."

Millions of refugees have returned since 2001 and millions of children are back in school. Hundreds of clinics and many hundreds of kilometres of roads have been built.

New shops and offices have gone up in Kabul but the power is still intermittent and many streets are in a dire condition. Many ordinary Afghans say their lives are no better.

"The only changes we can see since the US invasion is the return of some refugees and the freedom," said student Ghulam Haider. "We're happy about this but we still face a lot of challenges."

Most Afghans say they want foreign troops to stay, at least until their own security forces can take over.

But some blame the foreigners.

"Since the Americans invaded Afghanistan there has been no change to the lives of ordinary Afghans, especially security," said Kabul resident Qayoom Khan.

"The cause of all the misery in this country is America."



Shushashoner Jonney Nagarik (Shujon) forms a human chain at Manik Mia Avenue yesterday as part of its countrywide programme demanding a meaningful talks.

Shujon demands meaningful talks, overall reforms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Shujon, a voluntary organisation, organised human chain programmes across the country yesterday demanding a meaningful dialogue between the ruling party and the opposition and overall reforms reflecting the aspirations of the

people.

In the capital, Shujon or Shushashoner Janney Nagarik held the programme at Manik Mia Avenue in front of the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban. People from all walks of life, civil society members and noted personalities joined the human chain.

They called for resolving the current political impasse, making the Election Commission independent, ensuring democracy within the political parties, making the registration of political parties mandatory, and providing detailed information about candidates in the elections.

Welcoming the dialogue on reforms, Shujon President Prof Muzaffer Ahmad stressed the need for fundamental reforms.

The demand for reforms is now the demand of people, he said, adding that honest and dedicated persons should be elected to strengthen democracy in the country.

He also underscored the need for holding election in time.

Former chief election commissioner Justice Abdur Rouf, former adviser to the caretaker government ASM Shahjahan, woman leader Dr Hamida Hossain, Shujon Secretary Dr Badiul Alam Mojumdar, Dr Zafarullah Chowdhury of Gonoshasthya Kendra, columnist and researcher Syed Abul Moksud and Khushi Kabir of Nijera Kari took part in the programme.

Leaders of different socio-political and cultural organisations also joined the human chain to express solidarity with the demands.

NARAYANGANJ DOUBLE MURDER Rakibul seeks justice

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An escapee from double murder incident yesterday called for exemplary punishment of the persons who killed his mother and sister in Narayanganj on June 27, 2006.

At a press conference at the National Press Club in the city Rakibul Hasan Shanto said he was escaped as he was not present at his home at Deovogh on that fateful night.

Hasan said his uncle Nurul Haque and first cousins were involved in the killing of his mother and sister.

He urged the government for bringing the killers to justice.

Police arrested five hired killers and five relatives of Hasan including members of his uncle's family on June 10.

The killers were hired by Nurul and cousins for Tk 1.20 lakh to kill Hasan's mother Monwara Begum, 45, and sister Razia Sultana Munni, 17.

Nurul filed a murder case with Narayanganj Police Station as plaintive.

But when police upon suspicion quizzed Nurul he admitted his involvement in the murder.

Hasan's father committed suicide five years ago.

Kamal, an arrestee and son of Nurul, has told police that Hasan's father was forced to commit suicide.

Hasan has also asked for his security as his three other cousins who are known as cadre in the area are threatening him to kill.



PHOTO: STAR
Rakibul Hasan Shanto of Narayanganj speaks at a press conference at the National Press Club in the city yesterday demanding that killers of his mother and sister be brought to justice.

Mass reception to Khaleda at N'ganj today

BSS, Narayanganj

Narayanganj district Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) will accord a mass reception to party Chairperson and Prime Minister Khaleda Zia at a public meeting at BB Road at 3:30pm today.

District administration sources said the prime minister will inaugurate the newly constructed Kanchan Bridge across the river Shitalakha at Kanchan under Rugganj upazila.

She will also lay the foundation stones of Demra-Tarabo Bridge at Tarabo point and Shitalakha Bridge at Hajiganj point of the river Shitalakha under Narayanganj Sadar Police Station.