

Baghdad violence

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That has brought a risk that millions of ordinary but almost universally armed Iraqis may be dragged into all-out civil war.

US, Iraqi and international leaders have sounded alarms this week as new data showed tens of thousands of people have fled their homes in fear of death squads since a government of Shias, Sunnis and Kurds was formed in May and that some 6,000 civilians may have been killed in violence in two months.

The regular Friday ban on traffic in Baghdad from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. has been extended to 7 p.m. for the day, state media said. An overnight curfew operates daily from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m.

Describing the capital as a "must-win" for both the rebels and the government, US military spokesman Major General William Caldwell conceded on Thursday that Malik's month-old security clampdown in Baghdad had achieved only a "slight downtick" in violence, with civilian deaths steady.

"They will do an all-out assault against the Baghdad area," he said. "We have seen the movement of terrorist elements into the Baghdad area. We have seen the flow occurring."

US-led forces have also been cracking down on Shia warlords, many of them apparently rogue elements of pro-government militias that Malik has promised to rein in.

British forces in the Shia southern city of Basra said they arrested two men in separate operations early on Friday.

"We strongly suspect them of terrorist activities ... including executions, kidnappings, attacks on Coalition forces bases and patrols and attacks on Basra civilians," Major Charlie Burbidge, a British military spokesman, said.

He declined to say which group they belonged to but said they were "significant" figures, albeit less senior than a man seized on Sunday who fellow militants said was the commander of the Mehdi Army Shia Islamist militia in Basra.

British officers say elements of the Mehdi Army, widely blamed by Sunnis and secular Shias for running death squads against them, are not under the control of its nominal leader, radical young cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, whose followers hold a number of important ministries in Malik's government.

Maliki goes next week to Washington, where President George W Bush hopes for progress in Iraq that may help at November's congressional elections and make it easier to withdraw troops.

But Iraqi politicians and diplomats increasingly question the resolve within the government and parliament to set aside partisan aims to stop a bloody break-up of the oil-rich state.

In Baquba, US troops killed six Iraqi civilians yesterday during a raid against a suspected insurgent hide-out, local police said, as security forces imposed an extended vehicle ban in strife-torn Baghdad. The US military said one suspected "terrorist" was killed in the operation and several people wounded, but an AFP photographer saw six bodies, including that of a child, in a nearby hospital.

Iraqi police said the raid took place near the city of Baquba, northeast of Baghdad, and that two women and a young girl were among six civilian casualties. Some 20 people were wounded, an officer said.

AUS statement did not confirm this version of events, but said that wounded people had been treated on the spot and at coalition military bases.

"As the troops began to secure the area, they received small arms fire from the roof top of one of the initial target buildings," the US statement said, adding that soldiers had shouted warnings before calling in air support.

"Aerial fires were placed on the building and then halted. A third attempt to call the occupants out of the buildings then failed ... The troops secured the area using a combination of aerial and ground fire," it said.

While a US spokesman would not

confirm or deny the reported civilian death toll, the initial statement said: "We regret that civilians are hurt or killed while coalition forces search to rid Iraq of terrorism."

Mohammed Omar, a resident of the area, said that local guards had opened fire on the US soldiers thinking they were insurgents.

Another local resident, Ahmed Humam, said at least 20 people had been wounded and were "taken by the Americans".

The US military has repeatedly come under criticism for the killing of Iraqi civilians, the most notable case being November's alleged rampage by Marines in Haditha in the western Al-Anbar province in which 24 civilians were killed.

Diyala province, especially the area around its provincial capital, Baquba, has been riven by sectarian fighting, with gunmen from both the Sunni and Shiite communities carrying out massacres of civilians.

Sectarian militia have also been carrying out increasing numbers of killings in the capital Baghdad, where authorities extended a vehicle ban tied to Friday's weekly prayers from four to eight hours.

A recent UN report on the situation in Iraq, which noted that 40 percent of the civilian casualties in the first six months of the year occurred in May and June, also mentioned the increased attacks on places of worship.

"Attacks against mosques of Sunni and Shia denomination, as well as against religious authorities, have also reportedly resulted in diminished attendance," the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq's human rights report said.

The security operation has put 50,000 US and Iraqi troops on the streets, mostly visible as an increased series of checkpoints, but also in more numerous operations around the city.

Voter list update

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door visits will begin on Sunday.

Our correspondent from Bogra adds: Bogra District Election Office said voter listing forms have been distributed to assistant registration officers (ARO) at different upazilas.

The office sources said around 1,900 AROs have been appointed to collect voters' particulars by going from door to door.

The task did not begin in most of the areas of the district due to the teachers' strike, sources said.

Our Netrakona correspondent found that District Election Officer (DEO) Mohammad Salamattullah Mia absent at the office at 11:00am.

This correspondent also visited the different villages of Aptara, Barhatta and Purbadhala upazila and found that no assistant officers on duty for updating voter list. This correspondent also visited different areas of Netrakona and Mohonganj paurasava and found some scene.

Many young's were waiting at different villages of visited three upazilas but no election officials went there for updating of voter list.

Our Rajshahi Correspondent adds: An assistant registration officer of Rajshahi said that he employed assistants numbering 12 who will go door to door and report him on the next day. However, he could not tell where actually his assistants were working.

Visiting city areas, none was found visiting houses for updating voter list.

Some ARO reported that they were yet to start the work, as they have not received orders and necessary forms.

Nilphamari Correspondent adds: On the first day of the updating task on Friday, no activity was visible in any upazila election office. All the six upazila election offices remained closed.

greater alliance during the caretaker government period, said a party insider.

The AL allies fear that if such grand alliance is formed, the number of seats for them will decrease.

The senior leaders will point out to Hasina these matters so that they can remove the existing disagreement and work out a strategy to ensure victory in the upcoming election.

JSD President Hasanul Haque Inu, however, said they have no dispute inside the alliance. "We are at the first stage of the proposed three-stage coalition-movement, election and forming government," he observed.

But some other leaders expressed different views. They said they want to go for an immediate agreement over seat sharing. "We want to settle the issue right now," a senior leader told The Daily Star, seeking anonymity.

Pakistani

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papers that would allow Khan to slip back into the United States.

According to the FBI, Khan planned to carry out attacks on gasoline stations on his return to the country.

The prosecution at the trial had relied largely on Paracha's confession to FBI agents which he later recanted, saying that it had been secured under pressure and insisting he had no connection with Al-Qaeda.

His argument was dismissed by US District Court Judge Sidney Stein who said Paracha was fully aware of who he had been dealing with.

Jagannath varsity

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activists of BCL, JCD and some leftwing student organisations.

BCL university unit President Kamrul Hasan Ripon, General Secretary Gazi Abu Sayeed, JCD university unit President ABM Parvez Reza and other leaders were present at the meeting with Vice Chancellor Prof Sirajul Islam Khan.

However, ICS university unit President Nizamul Islam Nayeem denied the allegation of carrying out fresh attacks on their rivals.

The main entrance of the university has been closed and a huge number of law enforcers have been deployed all around the campus.

Access to the campus has been restricted for all except teachers.

The authorities assured that students with IDs would be allowed to enter the campus on July 24.

A seven-member committee headed by Registrar Abu Hossain Siddiqui has been formed to probe the violence and the committee is to submit its report within 10 days, said the authorities.

Lifschultz

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of Purna Chandra Mandal that no man under law could be sentenced to death were he not given the right of adequate defence. Later as the president, however, Sayem reafirmed the death sentence on Taher within 24 hours of the verdict, Lifschultz said.

Describing Sayem's action as a "phenomenon of a judge acting as a criminal", Lifschultz said it was more than a simple example of human hypocrisy.

He also criticised the role of the then chief prosecutor former justice ATM Afzal saying the chief prosecutor was to be rewarded after the trial with an appointment to the position of a judge at the Dhaka High Court and would become chief justice of the Supreme Court. But a worried man in 1976, Afzal anxiously claimed to his colleagues that he was stunned more than anyone at the sentence of death, Lifschultz said.

"But did Afzal publicly protest the verdict or express regret for the role he played in this tragic charade?" Lifschultz said, adding, "Did he ever consider walking out and say he would not be a party to a secret trial held within the boundary of the central jail?"

On the role of local media during Taher's prosecution, he said not a single item on the case or his deportation by the then government for attempting to report on the trial had appeared in the Bangladesh press throughout the month of the trial. Every editor and many journalists, however, knew precisely what was going on inside the walls of the central jail, he said.

Kamal Lohani, president of the Colonel Taher Sangsad, chaired the discussion programme. Dr Kamal Hossain, president of Gono Forum, Rashid Khan Menon, president of Workers' Party of Bangladesh, Sharif Nurul Bania, vice-president of Jatiya Samaitantrik Dal, Prof Anwar Hossain, younger brother of Col Taher, and Ruhul Kuddus Babu, general secretary of Taher Sangsad, also spoke at the meeting.

Nayan murdar

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publication of autopsy report is pushing us behind. But we want justice anyway," Nayan Banu's son Badsha Miah said.

Now everything depends on the autopsy report, said Foysal, son of Badsha Miah.

"As autopsy report is an important part in the process of investigation, we can not take any final decision on the investigation being conducted on the incident," said Akhtarzuzaman, officer-in-charge of Savar Police Station.

SI Mukhesur Rahman of Savar Police Station allegedly beat and booted Nayan Banu to death on July 2 at Birulia in Savar. Mukhes was suspended shortly after the incident as primary investigation found him guilty of the murder.

Panna Bahini

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involvement with the gang and gave out information about firearms hidden throughout the area, said Rab sources.

Following up the leads, a Rab team went to raid places in Daulatpur upazila, taking the two with them.

But accomplices of the outlaws ambushed them as soon as they reached Char Sadipur at about 4:30am.

A fierce gunfight followed as the Rab members returned fire. Amirul and Mohon, meantime, got caught in crossfire trying to escape and died on the spot, Rab said.

The Rab team recovered one pistol, one rifle and 40 bullets from the scene.

According to police, Mohon stood accused in eight murder cases while Amirul in seven filed with different police stations at Daulatpur and Bheramara, Mirpur in Kushtia, Lalpur in Natore and Bagha in Rajshahi.

The Panna Bahini unleashed a reign of terror in a vast area spread over Kushtia, Natore, Pabna and Rajshahi districts. It became synonymous with killing, robberies, abduction and extortion.

Clashes between Panna Bahini and its rival Lalchad Bahini claimed at least 30 lives in five years.

Lalchad and his gang allegedly sheltered by a local ruling party lawmaker gained the upperhand after death of Panna, sources said.

Israel mobilises troops

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stronghold near the site of ancient Roman temple ruins -- and one in the southern port city of Tyre.

The Israeli military said two Israeli soldiers died in the fighting and several guerrillas were killed. Hezbollah's Al-Manar television said three Israeli soldiers were killed but did not mention guerrilla casualties.

Two Apache attack helicopters collided in an accident northern Israel near the Lebanon border early Friday, killing one air force officer and injuring three others, two seriously, Israeli officials said.

Al-Jazeera reported that four soldiers were killed in the crash, but did not give a source.

The commander of Israel's air force appointed an inquiry team to determine the cause.

Two Israelis were also seriously wounded when rockets fired from Lebanon exploded in the northern port city of Haifa, the latest salvos in a deluge of nearly 1,000 rocket attacks since cross-border violence flared on July 12.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on Thursday demanded an immediate ceasefire, highlighting the human suffering caused by the deadliest cross-border fighting in a quarter century that has also killed 33 Israelis.

"Both the deliberate targeting by Hezbollah of Israeli population centres with hundreds of indiscriminate weapons and Israel's disproportionate use of force and collective punishment of the Lebanese people must stop," Annan said.

He proposed a blueprint calling for the deployment of a stabilization force and for Hezbollah to release two Israeli soldiers whose capture 10 days ago unleashed the Israeli onslaught on its northern neighbour.

But both Israel and Hezbollah rejected the call.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah issued a defiant new message that Israel's firepower was failing to dent his fundamentalist Shiite movement and vowed he would only release the soldiers in a prisoner swap.

"Even the whole universe would not be able to secure the release of the two Israeli soldiers unless there are indirect negotiations and an exchange of prisoners," he said.

"All of Israel's claims to have hit half of our missile potential and arsenal are nothing but erroneous words," Nasrallah said, warning of "more surprises" to come. "The leadership of Hezbollah has not

been touched."

Israeli troops had battled guerrillas long into the night Thursday after mounting an incursion into Lebanon, leaving four soldiers dead and two Hezbollah fighters. Another soldier was killed when two combat helicopters collided.

Israel has made no secret of its desire to liquidate Nasrallah and has already launched air raids destroying his offices and home and dropped 20 tonnes of bombs on what it believed to be a bunker where leaders were hiding.

Defence Minister Amir Peretz had warned Thursday that Israel would launch a full-scale ground invasion if necessary to crush Hezbollah, which has long been a thorn in the side of the Jewish state.

"Let no terror organisation feel we would cower from any operation," he said. "We have no intention of conquering Lebanon but... we will do it without thinking twice."

Lebanese Defence Minister Elias Murr responded that his army -- which has so far remained on the sidelines in Israel's war on Hezbollah -- would go into battle if Israel invaded.

"The Lebanese army will resist and defend the country and prove that it is an army worthy of respect," he said.

With no sign the international community is closer to brokering a ceasefire despite Annan's call, thousands of foreigners are continuing to be evacuated by sea to Cyprus while others pour across the border into Syria.

US Marines are out in force in Beirut for the first time in 22 years to help take American citizens to the neighbouring island of Cyprus which is being used as the evacuation hub.

The tiny Mediterranean island is however reeling from the influx, battling to find temporary accommodation and flights for the estimated 70,000 people expected to arrive from Lebanon at the height of the holiday season.

Thousands of Lebanese, in cars, trucks and minibuses, are also streaming out of southern Lebanon, where Israel's massive bombardment has left a trail of destruction and raised fears of a humanitarian catastrophe because of a shortage of food and medicines.

"The most basic human rights of the population are at risk or are being violated, including their rights to life, health and food," UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Louise Arbour said.

EC under fire for hiding facts

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"It will be more rational to update the voter roll and the Election Commission should publish the draft. But we all should consider everything with a positive view," the law minister said. He however said it is quite impossible for anybody to prepare a 'fake voter list'.

The minister urged the people to be more conscious so that every eligible voter is listed.

The EC, caretaker government, administration and army played their due role in the last three elections, he said.

Criticising CEC Aziz, eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain said he has lost credibility. "We need a dependable person as CEC, a person who will perform his duty independently and neutrally," he observed.

"Why does not he (CEC) quit the post voluntarily?" he questioned. "The Election Commission Secretariat should be free from control of the Prime Minister's Office and it should also be independent financially."

Dr Kamal, also president of the Gono Forum, called for publishing personal information and accounts of assets of each prospective candidate at least three months before an election.

He requested the law minister to take initiative for replacing the incumbent CEC and urged the CEC to resign. "Please give us relief from this complex situation and please make no more delay. If he wants, we would pay him all his salary in advance," the legal expert said.

"After leaving the post of CEC, he can take treatment at the CMH and we will arrange money from the people for

his treatment," Dr Kamal said without giving details.

Prof Muzaffer Ahmad said election would be more acceptable if the process of preparation of voter list is transparent.

"Some people don't want to allow watchdog bodies in the country to check the voter list. We should change our laws as well as our mindset. Initiatives should be taken for cancellation of the official secrecy act and for proper access to information," Muzaffer said.

Blaming the CEC and two other election commissioners, Barrister Amir-ul-Islam, president of the Supreme Court Bar Association, said, "A gang of four persons are now working at the EC. They have an agenda to derail democracy and the election system ... We should find those who want to design an arranged game in the name of election by manipulating the voter list."

Former adviser to caretaker government Hafizuddin Khan said it should be looked into who are responsible for the wastage of a huge amount of public money for preparing a controversial voter list. The money should be realised from them, said Hafiz, also a former auditor and comptroller general.

He resented that the EC misbehaved with journalists.

Barrister Rukanuddin Mahmud, vice chairman of Bangladesh Bar Council, said the EC has no moral right to prepare a voter list because it has lost credibility.

Journalist Ataus Samad said CEC Aziz should resign soon because everybody wants to see that.

Dr Badul Alam Majumder, country

Israel has imposed an air and sea blocked on Lebanon, put its only international airport out of action, bombed houses, roads, bridges, factories, warehouses and trucks, creating scenes reminiscent of the 1975-1990 civil war.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said he was willing to open up a humanitarian corridor to ease the crisis.

French Foreign Minister Philippe Douste-Blazy, on a visit to the region, issued appeals for a ceasefire and help for civilians, warning that the escalating conflict lead to a "catastrophe."

A despondent Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Siniora, who has issued desperate appeals for help from the international community, said there was no apparent settlement to end hostilities and blamed Israel's top ally in Washington.

"The United States is allowing Israel to pursue its aggression," he told AFP in an interview.

The US State Department said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice would travel to the region as early as next week to press for a political solution but Washington is refusing to back calls for a ceasefire until Hezbollah halts its rocket attacks.

Israel, which has sent ground troops back into Lebanon for the first time since it ended its 22-year occupation in May 2000, has also been emboldened by strong public support at home.

A poll published Friday found that 95 percent believed that the military action against Hezbollah was "justified and correct".

But even in Israel, doubts were emerging about the effectiveness of an offensive that has failed to stop Hezbollah fire, eliminate its leadership or push fighters back from the border.

Israel is also pushing on with its air, sea and ground offensive on the Gaza Strip, where at least 106 people have been killed in two weeks, and warned civilians that homes storing weaponry were now targets.

The operation was launched with the aim of retrieving a soldier snatched by Palestinian militants and stopping rocket fire.

Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniya, whose Hamas-led government has seen its ministries bombed and ministers arrested, warned Arabs and Palestinians were at "strategic risk" from Israel's parallel offensives.

JCD musclemen beat 2 BCL activists at JU

JU CORRESPONDENT

A group of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) musclemen beat up two student activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) at Shaheed Salam Barkatallah on Thursday night.

Reza, 35th batch of Archaeology department, and Zafar, 33rd batch of Bangla department, were the victims.

The JCD attack was led by Sohel, a 31st batch student of History and Anwar, a 32nd batch student of Bangla.

The JCD goons were also very upset about the dormitory provost A K M Shahinawaz's protesting the violence in the dorm.

The JCD later brought out a procession on the campus chanting threats to BCL activists of dire consequences.

Malaysia

FROM PAGE 1
letters from the Malaysian employers.

Baira has to maintain an office in Kuala Lumpur that will receive all electronically generated approval letters or job orders from Division-N and distribute those among the recruiting agencies in Bangladesh with a copy to the country's mission in Kuala Lumpur.

Baira's Kuala Lumpur office and its headquarters in Dhaka have to install a customised online system connected with Malaysian home ministry and immigration department to begin the process of recruitment, the official said.

As per the new policy, workers' passports will be stamped by the immigration department at Kuala Lumpur International Airport instead of Malaysian High Commission in Dhaka.

Meanwhile, Malaysia is facing a severe crisis of workers for its industries following deportation of some 400,000 illegal workers so far, an AFP report said.

Some 5 to 10 lakh illegal workers are still in that country and it has planned a fresh crackdown on them. This would further increase the demand for legal workers.

Malaysia is one of the largest importers of foreign workers in Asia. Foreign workers, both legal and illegal, number around 2.6 million of its 10.5 million-strong workforce.

Hasina: Jubo League

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have to take the responsibility for any unwanted situation centring the upcoming parliamentary elections," Hasina told the Jubo League leaders who called on her prior to their countrywide organisational tour.

"We placed the reform proposals because we want a free, fair and neutral election. We do not want anyone's favour," Hasina said, adding that it is necessary to safeguard people's democratic rights to voting.

"If votes are not protected, the accountability of a government does not sustain," the former prime minister said, adding that a government indulges in corruption, torturing and repressing people when it has lack of accountability.

Hasina said if the PM thinks that she will hold a national election according to her wish, she is completely wrong. "We will not allow such election in the country," Hasina asserted.

Accusing late president Ziaur Rahman of having introduced the "vote stealing culture" in the country, Hasina said the nation could not be freed from that culture even today.

She alleged that the BNP-led four-party coalition government came to power "by rigging the 2001 election with the help of the then caretaker government, Election Commission, armed forces, police, BDR and the polling and presiding officers".

The AL president warned her archrival that "such election is not possible in Bangladesh any more".

The four-party coalition was able to steal votes in the 2001 election as the AL was not prepared for such things, Hasina said asking her party leaders to form a "vote protection committee" at the polling centres across the country so that the gov-

Striking teachers

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Minar on July 24.

Another faction of Shikhhak Karmachari Oikya Jote led by Prof Shariful Islam will hold a meeting of their representatives at the Central Shaheed Minar today where they will announce 'tougher' programmes.

"We will not agree to sit in the dialogue if the government does not invite all groups of teachers and send formal letters," said Jote leader Prof Mazharul Hannan, who is also the president of Bangladesh Principals' Association.

Non-government teachers and employees have been observing indefinite strike since July 6 demanding 100 per cent basic salary from the government exchequer and other facilities.

Teachers of polytechnic institutes under the banner of Bangladesh Polytechnic Teachers Association (BPTA) begin four-day work abstention today to press home their 10-point demand including the introduction of job pattern, time scale and promotion.

Teachers, employees and students of 20 government polytechnic and three mono-technic institutes will observe the work abstention, a BPTA press release said yesterday.

Musharraf warns

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he reiterated Pakistan's condemnation and repeated an offer to help with the investigation into the deadly blasts.

"Pakistan, the entire nation, the government and myself strongly condemned the Mumbai blasts," said Musharraf.

"We are extremely grieved over the loss of so many innocent lives. I offer my condolence to all the families. Pakistan itself is a victim of terrorism and the country has stood firm against the menace."

"We are with you in the fight against terrorism," he said.

Meanwhile, India yesterday spurned an offer from Pakistan to help in investigations into the Mumbai serial train blasts, telling Islamabad instead to clamp down on militants operating from its soil.

"(Pakistan) President Pervez Musharraf's offer of helping in the Mumbai investigations ... is no cause for satisfaction in view of the fact Pakistan has refused to cooperate in the past," foreign ministry spokesman Navtej Sarna told a media briefing in New Delhi.

"If they really want to convince us ... they have to take some act (against militants) immediately and they can."

Sarna repeated India's demand that Pakistan hand over Syed Salahuddin, the chief of militant outfit Hizbul Mujahideen which is fighting Indian rule in disputed Kashmir.

He said Pakistan should also hand over underworld leader Dawood Ibrahim, wanted in connection with deadly bombings in Mumbai in 1993. Pakistan denies Ibrahim is based in the country.

Sarna rejected Musharraf's request that India furnish proof of a Pakistani link to the bombings, saying that Islamabad had never in the past acted on evidence it had provided that Pakistan was being used as a springboard for militants operating against India.

An anti-Indian insurgency which has been raging in Kashmir since 1989 has left more than 44,000 people dead by official count.

ernment cannot repeat the practice. She also directed the Jubo League leaders to take initiatives so that no one of 18 years of age is left out of the voter list.

The opposition leader urged her party leaders and workers to make all-out preparations for the next national elections.

She accused the alliance government of killing opposition leaders and activists in "crossfire" without any trial using the Rapid Action Battalion (Rab). "Such extrajudicial killings are against human rights and the constitution," she said.

She asked her party leaders to prepare lists of the complainants of false cases against AL leaders and activists.

The AL president feared the government might kill and harass her party leaders ahead of the election as it did ahead of the 2001 elections. She said the government might give a list of AL leaders implicated in "false" cases to the Rab to harass them.

She accused the alliance government of looting thousands of crores of public money by increasing the prices of essentials. "The people must get back the looted money," she said.

Hasina said it is the habit of the "extreme nationalist forces" like BNP and Jamaat to resort to anti-India propagandas before elections. "They are now holding me responsible for India's stopping exports of